

Volume One of
THE PLAYS
OF
J. B. PRIESTLEY

By J. B. PRIESTLEY

FICTION

BRIGHT DAY	FARAWAY
THREE MEN IN NEW SUITS	ANGEL PAVEMENT
DAYLIGHT ON SATURDAY	THE GOOD COMPANIONS
BLACK-OUT IN GRETLEY	WONDER HERO
LET THE PEOPLE SING	BENIGHTED
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THE PLAYS
OF
J. B. PRIESTLEY

VOLUME I



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INTRODUCTION

BEFORE introducing the plays in this volume to the reader, I should like to make some brief observations on dramatic writing and my own particular attitude toward it. Although the dramatist may also be a man of letters, capable of producing novels, poems, essays, criticism, I believe that drama is not simply a branch of literature but a separate little art, with its own peculiar values and technicalities. (And one day, if I am spared, I hope to deal with this subject at some length, if only as a protest against the nonsense often offered us by literary professors and lecturers who write about the drama without understanding the Theatre.) I hope that the plays in this volume can be enjoyed by a reader, but I must stress the fact that they were not written to be read but to be played in theatres, where if properly produced and acted they come alive. A play that has never found a theatre, actors, audiences, is not really a play at all. A dramatist is a writer who works in and for the Theatre. (It is a significant fact that all considerable dramatists play an active part in the first productions of their plays, and never accept the legendary role of the wistful little author whom everyone in the playhouse ignores.) If there are any Cezannes of the Theatre, working throughout a whole lifetime, misunderstood and neglected, I for one have never heard of them. A dramatist must have actors and audiences in order to realise himself: thus he must come to terms with the Theatre of his time.

My own time has not been an easy one. I did not begin writing for the Theatre until the early Thirties, the age of the Great Depression; then came the darkening shadow of the coming war; then the war itself; and now this present era of world conflict, in which small groups of weary men who have been given far too much power insist upon staging their own tremendous dramas, dwarfing our own harmless professional efforts. Although various breakaway experiments have been made—and I have made some myself—the theatrical tradition of our time is a naturalistic tradition, and so I have in the main had to come to terms with it. But to regard me, as some professorial theorists of the drama appear to have done recently, as a typical playwright of the naturalistic tradition seems to me so absurd that I can only imagine that it is a judgment based, like so many judgments from such quarters, on ignorance. Actually I have always fretted and conspired against downright naturalism. I have spent a good many of my working hours devising means to conjure audiences away from the prevailing tradition, after persuading them, perhaps for

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the first half-hour of a play, that they were safely within its bounds. It is for this reason—and not so much for reasons of economy—that I have so often favoured the play in one set; so that having carefully put us all in a sensible and respectable sitting-room, I could then begin playing my own particular tricks, edging away from conventional realism. In such plays within the tradition as *Eden End* and *The Linden Tree* I owe much to the influence of Tchekhov, notably in giving each act its own particular atmosphere (as if the characters were fish swimming in different coloured bowls), in suggesting by innumerable references a whole group of dramas outside the scene in hand, and in making the characters reveal more of themselves than would be considered necessary by the old-fashioned writer of the “well-made play”, which has always seemed to me to lack a dimension. In this kind of play, I believe, one’s primary object is neither to construct exciting “scenes” nor even to exhibit character but rather to conjure up the dramatic colour and shape, in all its absurdity and pathos, hope and heartbreak, of life itself.

DANGEROUS CORNER was first produced, at the Lyric Theatre, London, in the early summer of 1932. It had a bad Press and on the Saturday, three days later, I was told it ought to be taken off. If I had agreed, it is doubtful if the play would ever have been heard of again. As it was, I did not agree, with the result that since then it has been played all over the world, from the Arctic to the Amazon, and even now must appear in about a dozen playhouses every night. It has never been a favourite of mine, for it seems to me merely an ingenious box of tricks, which I constructed to prove—for it was my first play—that I could think and create like a dramatist and not necessarily like a novelist, and also to make use of the device of splitting time into two, thus showing what *might* have happened, an idea that has always fascinated me.

EDEN END was produced at the Duchess Theatre, London, in the autumn of 1934, and, at the time I am writing these notes, is about to be revived at the same theatre. It has always been a great favourite with the more serious repertory companies here in England, but has never been popular abroad, although when I was in Russia in 1945 the great Moscow Arts Theatre were planning to produce it. Re-reading it lately, because of the revival, I found myself wondering how I came to write this particular play, because everything in it is imagined—I have never known any people like the Kirby family—and I know nothing in my own life that would suggest to me this particular theme of the pathetic prodigal daughter. But it gave me great satisfaction to write it—and I can well remember now the exquisite summer evening when I completed the last act, the tender light of the dying day on my

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final page. I brooded for a long time over the people of this play and their lives, and then wrote it quickly and easily: and to my mind this is the way that plays ought to be written. The long brooding brings depth and richness; and the quick writing compels the whole mind, and not merely the front half of it, to work at the job.

TIME AND THE CONWAYS arrived at the same theatre three years later, and was successful both at home and abroad, where it is still being played a good deal. I do not like its first act now—it seems to me both fussy and clumsy—but the second act, technically, is as good as anything I had written for the Theatre up to that time, and when well produced, preferably with a young cast (as they had in an exquisite production I saw at the Josefstadt in Vienna in 1946), the third act can be very moving in its dramatic irony. It cannot be too strongly emphasised that this play is not merely working a trick, by reversing the last two acts, but that its whole point and quality are contained in the third act, when we know so much more about the characters than they know themselves. If this is not understood and appreciated, then the play fails.

I HAVE BEEN HERE BEFORE was produced at the Royalty Theatre, London, in the autumn of 1937, and has often been played both here and on the Continent, although it was a disastrous failure in New York, where on the whole I have been unlucky as a playwright. Yet a distinguished American producer, Mr. Jed Harris (who popped in and out of the history of this play like a mysterious *Jimnee*) made some valuable suggestions I was glad to adopt, for this was a play that, unlike most of the others, I re-wrote several times, chiefly because it was very difficult to explain Ouspensky's theory of recurrence on which the action was based. This play is an excellent example of the stealthy edging away from naturalism, noted earlier. Thus many of the speeches in the third act are far removed from conventional realistic dialogue, and yet nobody commented on this fact.

JOHNSON OVER JORDAN and MUSIC AT NIGHT are both experimental plays, and in both of them I was trying to find a dramatic formula that would enable me to take my characters outside time, as we are in our dreams, to create as it were a four-dimensional drama. For this reason both plays make great demands upon the producers and the chief players. MUSIC AT NIGHT was written for the Malvern Festival of 1938 and produced at the Westminster Theatre, London, just after the war began. Both at Malvern and in London it appeared to be better understood and appreciated by audiences than it was by most dramatic critics, who set their faces against this fancy stuff. The chief weakness of the play is that when I reached the third

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act I was trying to show that personality, the separate self, is an illusion—a hopeless task in the Theatre. *JOHNSON OVER JORDAN* appeared first at the New and then at the Savile Theatre, London, in the spring of 1939. Here for the first time I tried to make use of all the resources of the Theatre, including music and ballet, and this meant that our weekly running costs were very high, much too high, it soon appeared, for our box office. The play was “a failure”, yet to this day people I do not know buttonhole me to tell me how much they enjoyed it. (An American actress, who happened to be in London at that time, has told me since that she saw it fourteen times, and there were other people who saw it more times than that.) Even the most hostile critics declared that it was a great triumph for Ralph Richardson, who played Johnson, as indeed it was, but I cannot help wondering wistfully if what this fine actor had to do and to say in the play had not at least some small share in his triumph. After all, an actor has to have something to act. A play of this kind, very expensive to run and selecting its own audience, is an argument for repertory, for if it were played once a week, it would probably play to packed houses for years, whereas it costs too much and is too selective for the usual London policy of the separate run. Finally, let me add that *Johnson Over Jordan* must not be regarded as a play about life-after-death: it is really a biographical-morality play in which the usual chronological treatment is abandoned for a timeless-dream examination of a man's life.

THE LINDEN TREE arrived at the Duchess Theatre, London, in August, 1947, and ran very successfully for a year. It was written during the cruel February of 1947 when, short of fuel, almost snowed up, I had to work, eat and sleep in one small room in my house in the Isle of Wight; and there, besieged, I lived with the Linden family for ten days or so while writing this play. I was particularly fortunate in my producer and chief players, and no play of mine was ever given a more solid welcome by both Press and public than this one was. Yet, on the familiar “colour and glamour” view of the Theatre, no play could have been made out of less promising material. It opened no magic casements for anybody. It confronted our audiences with their own drab scene. Technically it was a return to the method of *Eden End*, although rather more complex and subtle in its family relationships and making demands on much that I had learned since 1934. Let me say in conclusion that plays of this kind may call for no great mastery of language or imposing flights of imagination, but they have their own innumerable difficulties, not unlike the problems of tone faced by the old Dutch painters; and now and again I grow a little impatient when hoity-toity young men, who have done nothing

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yet in the Theatre but lounge in it, refer patronisingly, as if from some vast invisible height of accomplishment, to this kind of play, hinting that they and their friends could easily knock off this sort of thing if they chose to try. Well, let them try, for the need of the Theatre is pressing. Later on, having learned something in this humble field, they can attempt the new *Oedipus* or *Lear* on which they must be brooding on their distant heights. If they succeed, on whatever level, may I be there to applaud!

J. B. PRIESTLEY

July, 1948.

DANGEROUS CORNER

A Play in Three Acts

CHARACTERS

ROBERT CAPLAN
FREDA CAPLAN
BETTY WHITEHOUSE
GORDON WHITEHOUSE
OLWEN PEEL
CHARLES TREVOR STANTON
MAUD MOCKRIDGE

SCENE: Drawing-room of the Caplan's house at Chantbury Close.
After dinner.

ACTS II and III same as ACT I.

Dangerous Corner—Copyright, 1932, by J. B. Priestley.

Produced in May, 1932, at the Lyric Theatre, London, with the following cast:

ROBERT CAPLAN	RICHARD BIRD
FREDA CAPLAN	MARIE NEY
BETTY WHITEHOUSE	ISLA BEVAN
GORDON WHITEHOUSE	WILLIAM FOX
OLWEN PEEL	FLORA ROBSON
CHARLES TREVOR STANTON	FRANK ALLENBY
MAUD MOCKRIDGE	ESME CHURCH

Produced by TYRONE GUTHRIE

ACT I

The curtain rises on a stage in darkness. There is a sound of a revolver shot, somewhat muffled, followed by a woman's scream, a moment's silence. After a small interval of silence, FREDa says, with a touch of irony, "There!" and switches on the lights at mantelpiece.

She is revealed as a handsome and vivacious woman of about thirty. She remains standing by the mantelpiece for a second or two.

OLWEN, a dark, distinguished creature, FREDa's contemporary, is discovered sitting in a chair near the fireplace.

BETTY, a very pretty young thing, is lounging on a settee, and Miss MOCKRIDGE, who is your own idea of what a smart middle-aged woman novelist should be, is seated securely in the middle of the room.

They are all in evening dress, and have obviously been listening to the wireless—from the cabinet on the table, and waiting for the men to join them. FREDa starts to move across to switch off the set when the wireless announcer, speaking in the accents of his kind, begins:

ANNOUNCER: You have just been listening to a play in eight scenes, specially written for Broadcasting, by Mr. Humphrey Stout, called "The Sleeping Dog."

FREDa (*crossing slowly to radio*): And that's that. I hope it didn't bore you, Miss Mockridge?

MISS M.: Not in the least.

BETTY: I don't like the plays and the stuffy talks. I like the dance music and so does Gordon.

FREDa (*switching off the wireless*): You know, Miss Mockridge, every time my brother Gordon comes here he annoys us by fiddling about trying to get dance music.

BETTY: I *adore* switching off the solemn pompous lecturers—just extinguishing them.

MISS M.: What did they call that play?

OLWEN: "The Sleeping Dog."

MISS M.: Why the sleeping dog?

BETTY: Because you had to let him lie.

FREDa: Let who lie?

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BETTY: Well, they were all telling lies, weren't they? Or they had been.

MISS M.: How many scenes did we miss?

OLWEN: Five, I think.

MISS M.: I suppose they must have been telling a lot of lies in those scenes. That's why that man was so angry—the husband, I mean.

BETTY: But which was the husband? Was it the one with the adenoid voice?

MISS M. (*briskly*): Yes, the one with the adenoid voice, and he went and shot himself. Very pathetic, I'm sure.

FREDA: Rather too many adenoids.

MISS M.: They're rather pathetic, too.

They laugh, and then there comes a subdued burst of laughter from the men in the dining-room.

BETTY: Listen to the men.

MISS M.: They're probably laughing at something very improper.

BETTY: No, just gossip. Men gossip like anything.

FREDA: Of course they do.

MISS M.: Quite right. People who don't like gossip aren't interested in their fellow creatures. I insist upon my publishers gossiping.

BETTY: Yes, but the men pretend it's business.

FREDA: They've got a marvellous excuse now that they're all three directors of the firm.

MISS M.: Yes, of course. Miss Peel, I think you ought to marry Mr. Stanton.

OLWEN: Oh, why should I?

MISS M.: To complete the pattern here. Then there'd be three pairs of adoring husbands and wives. I was thinking so all through dinner.

FREDA: There you are, Olwen.

MISS M.: I'm almost prepared to marry Charles Stanton myself to be one of your charmed circle. What a snug little group you are.

FREDA: Are we?

MISS M.: Well, aren't you?

FREDA (*giving the tiniest laugh*): Snug little group. How awful.

MISS M.: Not awful at all. I think it's charming.

FREDA (*smiling*): It sounds disgusting.

BETTY: Yes. Like Dickens or a Christmas card.

MISS M.: And very nice things to be. In these days almost too good to be true.

FREDA (*apparently amused*): Oh, why should it be?

OLWEN: I didn't know you were such a pessimist, Miss Mockridge.

MISS M.: Didn't you? Then you don't read the reviews of my books—and you ought to, you know, being an employee of my publishers. I shall complain of that to my three directors when they come in. (*Gives a slight laugh.*) Certainly I'm a pessimist. But I didn't mean it that way, of course. I think it's wonderful.

FREDA: It is rather nice here. We've been lucky.

OLWEN: Enchanting. I hate to leave it. (*To Miss M.*) You know I'm in the town office now—not down here at the press—but I come back as often as I can.

MISS M.: I'm sure you do. It must be so comforting to be all so settled.

BETTY: Pretty good.

MISS M. (*to FREDA*): But I suppose you all miss your brother-in-law. He used to be down here with you too, didn't he?

FREDA (*who obviously does not like this*): You mean Robert's brother, Martin.

MISS M.: Yes, Martin Caplan. I was in America at the time and never quite understood what happened. Something rather dreadful, wasn't it? (*There is a pause and BETTY and OLWEN look at FREDA. MISS M. looks from one to the other.*) Oh, have I dropped a brick? I always am dropping bricks.

FREDA (*very quietly*): No, not at all. It was distressing for us at the time, but it's all right now. Martin shot himself. It happened nearly a year ago—last June, in fact—not here, but at Fallows End, about twenty miles away. He'd taken a cottage there.

MISS M.: Oh, yes—dreadful business, of course. I only met him twice, I think. I remember I thought him very amusing and charming. He was very handsome, wasn't he?

Enter STANTON and GORDON. STANTON is a man about forty, with a rather studied and slightly sardonic manner. GORDON is in his earlier twenties, and an attractive if somewhat excitable youngster.

OLWEN: Yes, very handsome.

STANTON (*with jovial condescension*): Who's very handsome?

FREDA: Not you, Charles.

STANTON: May we know or is it some grand secret between you?

GORDON (*taking BETTY's hand*): They were talking about me. Betty, why do you allow them all to talk about your husband in this fulsome fashion. Have you no shame, girl?

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BETTY (*holding his hand*): Darling, I'm sure you've had too much manly gossip and old brandy. You're beginning to look purple in the face and bloated—a typical financier.

Enter ROBERT. He is in his early thirties and is a good specimen. You might not always respect his judgment, but you cannot help liking him.

✓ ROBERT: Sorry to be so late, Freda—but it's that wretched puppy of yours.

FREDA: Oh, what's it been doing now?

ROBERT: It was eating the script of Sonia William's new novel, and I thought it might make him sick. You see, Miss Mockridge, how we talk of you novelists.

MISS M.: Yes, I heard you. I've just been saying what a charming cosy little group you've made here, all of you.

✓ ROBERT: I'm glad you think so.

MISS M.: I think you've all been lucky.

ROBERT: I agree, we have.

STANTON: It's not all luck, Miss Mockridge. You see, we all happen to be nice easy-going people.

ROBERT (*playfully, perhaps too playfully*): Except Betty—she's terribly wild.

STANTON: That's only because Gordon doesn't beat her often enough—yet.

MISS M.: You see, Miss Peel, Mr. Stanton is still the cynical bachelor—I'm afraid he rather spoils the picture.

STANTON: Miss Peel can't afford to talk—she's transferred herself to the London office and deserted us.

✓ OLWEN: I come back here as often as I'm asked.

GORDON: But whether it's to see me or Robert, we can't yet decide. Anyhow, our wives are getting jealous.

BETTY (*laughing*): Oh, frightfully.

GORDON (*beginning to fiddle about with wireless*): What's disturbing the ether to-night? Anybody know?

FREDA: Oh, Gordon, don't start it again. We've only just turned it off.

GORDON: What did you hear?

FREDA: The last half of a play.

OLWEN: It was called "The Sleeping Dog."

STANTON: Why?

MISS M.: We're not sure—something to do with lies, and a gentleman shooting himself.

STANTON: What fun they have at the B.B.C.

OLWEN (*who has been thinking*): You know, I believe I understand that play now. The sleeping dog was the truth, do you see, and that man—the husband—insisted upon disturbing it.

ROBERT: He was quite right to disturb it.

STANTON: Was he? I wonder. I think it a very sound idea—the truth as a sleeping dog.

MISS M. (*who doesn't care*): Of course we do spend too much of our time telling lies and acting them.

BETTY (*in her best childish manner*): Oh, but one has to. I'm always fibbing. I do it all day long.

GORDON (*still fiddling with the wireless*): You do, darling, you do.

BETTY: It's the secret of my charm.

MISS M. (*rather grimly*): Very likely. But we meant something much more serious.

ROBERT: Serious or not, I'm all for it coming out. It's healthy.

STANTON: I think telling the truth is about as healthy as skidding round a corner at sixty.

FREDA (*who is being either malicious or enigmatic*): And life's got a lot of dangerous corners—hasn't it, Charles?

STANTON (*a match for her or anybody else present*): It can have—if you don't choose your route well. To lie or not to lie—what do you think, Olwen? You're looking terribly wise.

OLWEN (*very seriously*): I agree with you. I think telling everything is dangerous. The point is, I think—there's truth *and* truth.

GORDON: I always agree to that. Something *and* something.

STANTON: Shut up, Gordon. Go on, Olwen.

MISS M.: Yes—go on.

OLWEN (*thoughtfully*): Well—the real truth—that is, every single little thing, with nothing missing at all, wouldn't be dangerous. I suppose that's God's truth. But what most people mean by truth, what that man meant in the wireless play, is only half the real truth. It doesn't tell you all that went on inside everybody. It simply gives you a lot of facts that happened to have been hidden away and were perhaps a lot better hidden away. It's rather treacherous stuff.

GORDON: Yes, like the muck they drag out of everybody in the law courts. Where were you on the night of the 27th of November last? Answer yes or no.

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MISS M. (*who obviously likes a discussion*): I'm not convinced, Miss Peel. I'm ready to welcome what you call half the truth—the facts.

ROBERT: So am I. I'm all for it.

FREDA (*enigmatically*): You would be, Robert.

ROBERT: What do you mean by that, Freda?

FREDA (*nonchalantly*): Anything, nothing. Let's talk about something more amusing. Who wants a drink? Drinks, Robert. And cigarettes.

ROBERT (*examining cigarette box on table*): There aren't any here.

FREDA: There are some in this one. (*Taking up musical cigarette box from table.*) Miss Mockridge, Olwen—a cigarette? (*Offering the box.*)

OLWEN (*looking at the box*): Oh, I remember that box. It plays a tune at you, doesn't it. I remember the tune. Yes, it's the Wedding March, isn't it? (*She opens the box, taking a cigarette, and the box plays its own charming tinkly version of the Wedding March.*)

ROBERT: Good, isn't it?

FREDA (*shutting the box*): It can't have been this box you remember. This is the first time I've had it out. It belonged to—someone else.

OLWEN: It belonged to Martin, didn't it? He showed it to me.

There is a tiny silence. The two women look at one another steadily.

FREDA: He couldn't have shown it to you, Olwen. He hadn't got it when you saw him last.

STANTON: How do you know he hadn't got it, Freda?

FREDA: That doesn't matter. I do know. Martin couldn't have shown you this box, Olwen.

OLWEN: Couldn't he? (*Looks at FREDA significantly for a second, then makes a quick change of manner.*) No, perhaps he couldn't. I suppose I got mixed up. I must have seen a box like this somewhere else, and then pushed it on to poor Martin because he was always so fond of things like this.

FREDA moves away.

ROBERT: Olwen, I'm going to be rather rude, but I know you won't mind. You know you suddenly stopped telling the truth *then*, didn't you? You're absolutely positive that this is the box Martin showed you, just as Freda is equally positive it isn't.

OLWEN: Well, does that matter?

GORDON (*fiddling with wireless*): Not a hoot. I'm trying to find some dance music, but this thing has suddenly decided not to function.

ROBERT (*with irritation*): Then don't fiddle about with it.

BETTY: Don't bully Gordon.

ROBERT: Well, you stop him. No, I don't suppose it does matter, Olwen, but after what we'd been saying, I couldn't help thinking that it was rather an odd provoking situation.

MISS M. (*anxious to be entertained*): Just what I was thinking. It's all terribly provoking. More about the cigarette box, please.

FREDA: It's all perfectly simple——

OLWEN: Wait a minute, please, Freda. I don't think it is all perfectly simple, but I can't see that it matters now.

FREDA: I don't understand you.

ROBERT: Neither do I. First you say that it can't have been the same box and now you say it's not all perfectly simple and begin to hint at grand mysteries. I believe you're hiding something, Olwen, and that isn't like you. Either that box you saw was Martin's or it wasn't——

STANTON (*with his own blend of good humour and brutality*): Oh, damn the box.

BETTY: { Oh, but Charles—we'd like to hear——

MISS M.: { But Mr. Stanton——

STANTON: Sorry—but I hate a box that plays tunes at you like that anyway. Let's forget it.

GORDON (*with a sudden touch of bitterness*): Yes, and Martin too. He's not here—and we are, all warm and cosy—such a charming group.

ROBERT: Shut up, Gordon.

GORDON: Don't let's mention Martin or think about him. Bad form. He's dead.

FREDA: Well, there's no need to be hysterical about it, Gordon. One would think you owned Martin, to hear you talk.

BETTY: Instead of which, nobody owned Martin. He belonged to himself. He'd some sense.

ROBERT (*who is rapidly getting out of his depth*): What does all that mean, Betty?

BETTY (*with a laugh*): It means that I'm being rather stupid and that you're all talking a lot of rot and I think I'm going to have a headache any minute.

ROBERT: Is that all?

BETTY: Isn't that quite enough? (*She smiles at him.*)

ROBERT: Go on, Freda.

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FREDA: I wish you wouldn't be so absurdly persistent, Robert. But it's quite simple about the cigarette box. It came to us with some other of Martin's things from the cottage. I put it away and this is the first time it's been out here. Now the last time Olwen was at the Fallows End cottage was that Saturday when we all went over—you remember, at the very beginning of June.

GORDON (*with an undercurrent of real emotion*): Gosh—yes. What a day that was. And a marvellous night, wasn't it? That was the time when we all sat out in the garden for hours and Martin told us all about those ridiculous people he'd stayed with in Cornwall—the handwoven people—

BETTY: Yes—and the long, long, thin woman who always said: "Do you belong?"

GORDON (*who means it*): I don't think I ever had a better day. We'll never have another like that.

ROBERT: Yes, it was a good day. Though I'd no idea you'd been so excited about it, Gordon.

FREDA: Neither had anybody else. Gordon seems to have decided that he ought to be hysterical every time Martin is mentioned.

BETTY: I suspect it's Robert's old brandy. And those enormous glasses. They go to his head.

GORDON: Well, where do you want them to go to?

ROBERT (*to FREDA*): The point is, then, that that first Saturday in June was the last time Olwen was at Martin's cottage.

FREDA: Yes, and I know that he hadn't got this cigarette box then.

ROBERT: No, he'd have shown it to us if he'd had it then. As a matter of fact, I never remember seeing the thing at the cottage. So there you are, Olwen.

OLWEN (*with an uncertain smile*): There I am.

ROBERT: Yes, but—hang it all—where are you?

OLWEN (*smiling at him affectionately*): You are a baby, Robert. I don't know where I am. Out of the dock or the witness box, I hope.

MISS M.: Oh no, please. That would be too disappointing.

BETTY (*who has been thinking*): You know, that *wasn't* the last time you were at the cottage, Olwen. Don't you remember, you and I ran over the next Sunday afternoon, to see Martin about those little etchings?

OLWEN: Yes.

ROBERT: Yes, that's true.

BETTY: But I don't remember him showing us this cigarette box. In fact, I've never seen it before.

STANTON: I've never seen it before, and I don't think I ever want to see it again. I never heard such a lot of fuss about nothing. . .

FREDA: I wouldn't be too sure about that, Charles. But I may as well tell you—if only to have done with it—that Martin couldn't have shown you the box that Sunday anyhow, because he hadn't got it then.

STANTON (*not without malice*): You seem to know a lot about that box, Freda.

GORDON: That's just what I was going to say. Why are you so grand and knowing about it?

BETTY (*pointing triumphantly*): I know why. You gave it to him.

They all looked at FREDA.

ROBERT: Did you, Freda?

FREDA (*calmly*): Yes, I gave it to him.

ROBERT: That's queer. I don't mean it's queer your giving him the cigarette box—why shouldn't you? But it's queer your never mentioning it. When did you give it to him? Where did you pick it up?

FREDA (*still mistress of the situation*): That's all quite simple too. You remember the day before that awful Saturday. You were staying up in town, and I came up for the day. Well, I happened to see the cigarette box at Calthrop's. It was amusing and rather cheap, so I bought it for Martin.

ROBERT: And Calthrop's sent it to Martin, down at Fallows End, so that he never got it until that last Saturday?

FREDA: Yes.

ROBERT: Well, that's that.

GORDON: I'm sorry, Freda, but it's not quite so simple as all that. You mustn't forget that I was with Martin at the cottage that very Saturday morning.

ROBERT: Well, what about it?

GORDON: Well, I was there when the parcel post came, with the letters in the morning. I remember Martin had a parcel of books from Jack Brookfield—I don't forget anything about that morning, and neither would you if you'd been dragged into that hellish inquest as I was. But he didn't have that cigarette box.

FREDA: I suppose it must have arrived by the afternoon post then. What does it matter?

GORDON: It doesn't matter at all, Freda darling, except that at Fallows End parcels are never delivered by the afternoon post.

FREDA: Yes they are.

GORDON: No.

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FREDA (*sharply*): How do you know?

GORDON: Because Martin used to grumble about it and say that he always got books and manuscripts a day late. That cigarette box didn't arrive in the morning, because I saw the post opened, and it couldn't have been delivered in the afternoon. Freda, I don't believe those shop people in town ever *sent* the box. You *took* it to Martin yourself. You did, didn't you?

FREDA (*with a sudden rush of temper*): You are a fool, Gordon.

GORDON: Possibly. But remember I didn't start all this. You did take it to Martin, didn't you?

ROBERT: Did you?

FREDA (*hastily composing herself*): Well, if you must know—I did.

ROBERT: Freda!

GORDON: I thought so.

ROBERT (*amazed*): But, Freda, if you went to the cottage to give Martin the box after Gordon had left, you must have seen Martin later than anybody, only a few hours before he—before he shot himself.

FREDA: I did. I saw him between tea and dinner.

ROBERT: But why have you never said anything about it? Why didn't you come forward at the inquest? You could have given evidence.

FREDA: I could, but why should I? What good would it have done? It was bad enough Gordon having to do it——

GORDON: It was hell.

FREDA: If it could have helped Martin, I'd have gone. But it couldn't have helped anybody.

STANTON: That's true. You were quite right.

ROBERT: Yes, I can understand that. But why didn't you tell *me*? Why did you keep it to yourself, why have you kept it to yourself all this time? You were the very last person to talk to Martin.

FREDA: Was I the last person?

ROBERT: You must have been.

FREDA: Then what about Olwen?

ROBERT: Olwen—Oh—the cigarette box.

FREDA: Yes, of course—the cigarette box. Martin didn't get that box until after tea on that Saturday afternoon, and Olwen admitted that he showed it to her.

BETTY (*who obviously doesn't like all this*): No, she didn't. She said it was some other box, and I vote we believe her and have done with it.

MISS M.: No. No, Mrs. Whitehouse—

BETTY: Yes, I do. It's all wrong going on and on like this.

STANTON: And I second that.

ROBERT: And I don't.

BETTY: Oh, but Robert—

ROBERT: I'm sorry, Betty—though after all you don't come into this and it can't hurt you. But Martin was my brother and I don't like all these mysteries and I've a right to know.

OLWEN: All right, Robert. But must you know now?

FREDA (*coldly*): I don't see the necessity. But then I didn't see the necessity why I should have been cross-examined, with the entire approval of the company apparently. But now that it's your turn, Olwen, I've no doubt that Robert will relent.

ROBERT: I don't see why you should say that, Freda.

OLWEN: I'm sure you don't, Robert.

FREDA (*her turn now*): You might as well admit it, Olwen. Martin showed you that box, didn't he? So you must have seen him, you must have been to the cottage that Saturday night.

OLWEN: Yes, he did show me the box. That was after dinner—about nine o'clock—on that Saturday night.

ROBERT (*completely astounded*): You were there too? But this is crazy. First Freda—then you. And neither of you has said a word about it.

OLWEN: I'm sorry, Robert. I just couldn't.

ROBERT: But what were you doing there?

OLWEN: I'd been worried about—something—something that I'd heard—it had been worrying me for days, and at last I couldn't stand it any longer. I felt I had to see Martin to ask him about it. So I ran over to Fallows End. I had some dinner on the way, and got to the cottage just before nine. Nobody saw me go and nobody saw me leave—you know how quiet it was there. Like Freda, I thought it wouldn't serve any good purpose to come forward at the inquest—so I didn't. That's all.

ROBERT: But you can't dismiss it like that. You must have been the very last person to talk to Martin. You must know something about it.

OLWEN (*wearily*): It's all over and done with. Let's leave it alone. Please, Robert. (*With change of manner.*) Besides, I'm sure we must be boring Miss Mockridge with all this stuff.

MISS M. (*briskly*): Oh no, I'm enjoying it—very much.

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OLWEN: We don't mean to discuss it, do we, Freda? There's nothing to discuss. All over.

ROBERT (*who has been brooding. Emphatically*): But look here, Olwen, you must tell me this. Had your visit to Martin that night anything to do with the firm? You say you'd been worried about something.

FREDA: Oh, Robert, please.

ROBERT: I'm sorry, but I must know this. Was that *something* to do with that missing five hundred pounds?

GORDON (*excitedly*): Oh—for God's sake—don't drag that money into it. We don't want all that all over again. Martin's gone. Leave him alone, can't you, and shut up about the rotten money.

FREDA: Gordon, be quiet. You're behaving like an hysterical child to-night. (*To Miss M.*) I'm so sorry.

GORDON (*mumbling*): Oh, so am I. I beg your pardon, Miss Mockridge.

MISS M. (*rising*): Not at all. But I think—if you don't mind—it must be getting late.

FREDA: Oh, no.

ROBERT: It's early yet.

MISS M.: The Pattersons said they'd send their car over for me to take me back. Has it arrived yet, do you know?

ROBERT (*going to the door*): Yes, I heard it arrive when we left the dining-room and I told the man to wait in the kitchen. I'll get hold of him for you.

FREDA (*aware of the irony of this*): Oh, must you really go?

MISS M.: Yes, I really think I ought. It's at least half an hour's run to the Pattersons', and I don't suppose they like their car and chauffeur to be kept out too late. (*Shaking hands with FREDA.*) Thank you so much. (*Shakes hands with OLWEN.*) It's been so delightful seeing you all again—such a charming group you make here. (*Shakes hands with BETTY.*) Good-bye, Mrs. Whitehouse, good-bye. (*Shaking hands with STANTON.*)

FREDA (*going to door*): I think you left your wrap in my room. I'll get it for you.

MISS M. (*at the door*): Good-bye.

ALL: Good-bye.

FREDA (*going out*): I hear you had a very good time in America. . . .

Both women go out and door is shut. OLWEN looks at the books on shelves. BETTY moves up to the bay of piano and takes a cigarette.

STANTON, *after a sigh of relief, pours out a drink.*

GORDON: For this relief, much thanks.

BETTY: Good Lord—yes. I'm sorry, but I can't bear that woman. She reminds me too much of a geometry mistress we used to have at Lorsdale.

STANTON: I've always suspected your geometry, Betty. Drink, Gordon?

GORDON: No thanks.

STANTON: It's very rum—but nevertheless she's not at all a bad novelist. I don't mean she's just a good seller, but she's a goodish novelist too. Why is it there seems to be always something rather unpleasant about good novelists?

GORDON: I give it up. But I don't call Maud Mockridge a good novelist, Stanton.

BETTY: I bet she's a gossip.

STANTON: She is. She's notorious for it. That's why they ought to have shut up. She'll embroider that cigarette box story and have it all round London within a week. The Pattersons will have it to-night, to begin with. It must have been agony for her to go away and not hear any more.

GORDON: She wouldn't have gone if she'd thought she'd have heard any more. But she's got something to be going on with. (*With a chuckle.*) She'll probably start a new novel in the morning and we'll all be in it.

BETTY (*bravely*): Well, she'll have to use her imagination a bit about me.

STANTON: And me. Perhaps she'll invent the most frightful vices for us, Betty.

BETTY (*with a laugh*): She can't really do much with what she's just heard, you know. After all, why shouldn't Freda have taken Martin a cigarette box, and why shouldn't Olwen have gone to see him?

OLWEN (*looking at book, idly*): Yes, why not?

BETTY: Oh—I'd forgotten you were there, Olwen. Can I ask you something? After all I don't think I've asked anybody anything, so far, have I?

OLWEN: You can ask. I don't promise to answer.

BETTY: I'll risk it then. Were you in love with Martin, Olwen?

OLWEN (*steadily*): Not in the least.

BETTY: I thought you weren't.

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OLWEN: As a matter of fact, to be absolutely candid, I rather disliked him.

BETTY: Yes, I thought so.

GORDON: Oh—rot. I'll never believe that, Olwen. You *couldn't* dislike Martin. Nobody could. I don't mean he hadn't any faults or anything, but with him they just didn't matter. He was one of those people. You had to like him. He was Martin.

BETTY: In other words—your god. You know, Gordon literally adored him. Didn't you, darling?

STANTON: Well, he could be fascinating. And he was certainly very clever. I must admit the firm's never been the same without him.

GORDON: I should think not.

BETTY (*mockingly*): How could it be?

OLWEN *puts book back*. Enter ROBERT who goes to table, pours out drink, followed by FREDA who takes a cigarette.

ROBERT: Now we can thrash this out.

OLWEN: Oh no, please Robert.

ROBERT: I'm sorry, Olwen. But I want to know the truth now. There's something very queer about all this. First Freda going to see Martin, and never saying a word about it. And then you going to see him too, Olwen, and never saying a word about it either. It's not good enough. You've both been hiding this all along. You may be hiding other things too. It seems to me it's about time some of us began telling the truth—for a change.

FREDA: Do you always tell the truth, Robert?

ROBERT: I try to.

STANTON (*with irony*): Noble fellow. But don't expect too much of us ordinary mortals. Spare our weaknesses.

FREDA (*suddenly mischievous*): What weaknesses?

STANTON (*shrugging his shoulders*): Anything you like, my dear Freda. Buying musical cigarette boxes, for instance. I'm sure that's a weakness.

FREDA (*significantly*): Or making rather too much use of one's little country cottage. I think that, too, in certain circumstances might be described as a weakness.

STANTON: Do you mean Martin's cottage? I hardly ever went there.

FREDA: No, I wasn't thinking of Martin's. I must have been thinking of another one—perhaps your own.

STANTON (*looking at her steadily*): I'm afraid I don't understand.

ROBERT (*exasperated*): Look here, what's all this about? Are you starting now, Stanton?

STANTON: Certainly not. (*Laughs.*)

ROBERT: Well, I want to get to the bottom of this Martin business. And I want to do it now.

GORDON: Oh Lord, is this going to be another inquest?

ROBERT: Well, it wouldn't be necessary if we'd heard more of the truth perhaps when there was an inquest. And it's up to you, Olwen. You were the last to see Martin. Why did you go to see him like that? Was it about the missing money?

OLWEN: Yes, it was.

ROBERT: Did you know then that Martin had taken it?

OLWEN: No.

ROBERT: But you thought he had?

OLWEN: I thought there was a possibility he had.

GORDON (*bitterly*): You were all damned ready to think that.

BETTY (*urgently*): Gordon, I want to go home now.

ROBERT: So soon, Betty?

BETTY: I'm going to have an awful headache if I stay any longer. I'm going home—to bed.

GORDON: All right. Just a minute.

STANTON: I'll take you along, Betty, if Gordon wants to stay on.

BETTY (*going to GORDON*): No, I want Gordon to come along too.

GORDON: All right. (*Rising.*) I'll come along. But hang on a minute.

BETTY (*with sudden hysterical scream*): I tell you I want to go now. Take me home.

ROBERT: Why, what's the matter, Betty?

BETTY: I don't know. I'm stupid, I suppose.

GORDON: All right. We'll go. (*Follows her. FREDa rises.*)

STANTON: I'll come along too.

ROBERT: But, Betty, I'm awfully sorry if all this stuff has upset you. I know it's nothing to do with you, anyhow——

BETTY (*pushing him aside and running to the door*): Oh, don't go on and on about it. Why can't you leave things alone?

She rushes out and slams the door.

GORDON (*at the door*): Well, good night everybody.

STANTON (*going to door*): I'll see these infants home and then turn in myself.

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✓ OLWEN (*with irony*): Very good of you.

STANTON (*smiling grimly*): Good night.

After he goes out, the three who are left drift nearer the fire and one another, and the room has a nice intimate atmosphere.

ROBERT: And now, Olwen, you can tell me exactly why you rushed to see Martin like that about the missing money.

OLWEN: We're all being truthful now, are we?

ROBERT: I want to be.

OLWEN: What about you, Freda?

FREDA (*rather wearily*): Yes, yes, yes, I don't care. What does it matter?

ROBERT (*puzzled again*): Queer way of putting it.

FREDA: Is it? Well sometimes, Robert, I'm rather a queer woman. You'd hardly know me.

OLWEN: You started all this, you know, Robert. Now it's your turn. Will you be truthful with me?

✓ ROBERT: Good God! Yes—of course I will. I loathe all these silly mysteries. But it's not my turn. I asked you a question that you haven't answered yet.

✓ OLWEN: I know you have. But I'm going to ask you one before I do answer yours. I've been wanting to do it for some time but I've never had the chance or never dared. Now, I don't care. It might as well come out. Robert—did you take that money?

ROBERT (*amazed*): Did I take the money?

OLWEN: Yes.

ROBERT: Of course not. You must be crazy, Olwen. (OLWEN *gives a laugh of great relief*.) Do you think, even if I had taken it, I'd have let poor Martin shoulder the blame like that? But Martin took it, of course. We all know that.

OLWEN: Oh, what a fool I've been.

ROBERT: I don't understand. Surely you must have known that Martin took it. You can't have been thinking all this time that I did.

OLWEN: Yes, I have. And I've not been thinking it—I've been torturing myself with it.

✓ ROBERT: But why, why? Damn it all—it doesn't make sense. I might have taken the money—I suppose we're all capable of that, under certain circumstances—but never on earth could I have let somebody else—and especially Martin—take the blame for it. How could you think me capable of such a thing! I thought you were a friend of mine, Olwen—one of my best and oldest friends.

FREDA (*calmly and boldly*): You might as well know, Robert—

OLWEN (*greatly agitated*): Oh no, Freda. Please. Please.

FREDA (*calmly and taking OLWEN's arm*): Why not? What does it matter? You might as well know, Robert—and how you can be so dense baffles me—that Olwen is not a friend of yours.

ROBERT: Of course she is.

FREDA: She's not. She's a woman who's in love with you—a very different thing. She's been in love with you for ages.

OLWEN (*in great distress*): Freda, that's damnable unfair. It's cruel, cruel.

FREDA: It's not going to hurt you. And he wanted the truth. Let him have it.

ROBERT: I'm terribly sorry, Olwen. I suppose I've been stupid. We've always been very good friends and I've always been very fond of you.

OLWEN: Stop, stop. Oh, Freda, that was unforgivable. You'd no right to say that.

FREDA: But it's true, isn't it. You wanted the truth, Robert, and here it is—some of it. Olwen's been in love with you for ages. I don't know exactly how long, but I've been aware of it for the last eighteen months. Wives always are aware of these things, you know. And not only that, I'll tell you now what I've longed to tell you for some time—that I think you're a fool for not being aware of it yourself, for not having responded to it, for not having done something drastic about it long before this. If somebody loves you like that, for God's sake enjoy it, make the most of it, hold on to it, before it's too late.

OLWEN (*staring at her*): Freda, I understand now.

FREDA: Understand what?

OLWEN: About you. I ought to have understood before.

ROBERT: If you mean by that, that you understand now that Freda doesn't care for me very much—you're right. We've not been very happy together. Somehow our marriage hasn't worked. Nobody knows—

FREDA: Of course they know.

ROBERT: Do you mean you've told them?

FREDA: No, of course I haven't told them. If you mean by *they* the people we know intimately—our own group here—they didn't need to be told.

ROBERT: But Olwen here has just said she understood about it for the first time.

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OLWEN (*gently*): No, I knew about that before, Robert. It was something else I've just——

ROBERT: Well, what is it?

OLWEN: I'd rather not explain. (*Looking away.*)

FREDA: Being noble now, Olwen? You needn't, you know. We're past that.

OLWEN (*in distress*): No, it's not that. It's—it's because I couldn't talk about it. There's something horrible to me about it. And I can't tell you why.

FREDA (*staring at her*): Something horrible?

OLWEN: Yes, something really horrible. Don't let's talk about that side of it.

FREDA: But, Olwen——

OLWEN: I'm sorry I said I understood. It slipped out. Please——

FREDA: Very well. But you've got to talk about that money now. You said you believed all along that Robert had taken it?

OLWEN: It looked to me as if he must have done.

ROBERT: But if you believed that, why didn't you say something?

FREDA: Oh, Robert—can't you see why she couldn't?

ROBERT: You mean—she was shielding me?

FREDA: Yes, of course.

ROBERT: Olwen—I'm terribly sorry. I'd no idea. Though it's fantastic, I must say, that you could think I was that kind of man and yet go on caring enough not to say anything.

FREDA { But it's not fantastic at all.

(*together*): { That's why I said I'd been torturing myself with it.

OLWEN

FREDA (*emphatically*): If you're in love with somebody, you're in love with them, and they can do all sorts of things, be as mean as hell, and you'll forgive them or just not bother about it. At least, some women will.

ROBERT: I don't see you doing it, Freda.

FREDA (*recovering her normal self*): Don't you? But there are a lot of things about me you don't see. But this is what I wanted to say, Olwen. If you thought that Robert had taken that money, then you knew that Martin hadn't?

OLWEN: Yes, I was sure—after I had talked to him that last night—that Martin hadn't taken it.

FREDA (*bitterly*): But you let us all think he had.

OLWEN: I know. I know. But it didn't seem to matter then. It couldn't hurt Martin any more. He wasn't there to be hurt. And I felt I had to keep quiet.

ROBERT: Because of me?

OLWEN: Yes, because of you, Robert.

ROBERT: But Martin *must* have taken it.

OLWEN: No.

ROBERT: That's why he did what he did. He thought he'd be found out. He was terribly nervy—always was, poor chap. And he simply couldn't face it.

OLWEN: No, it wasn't that at all. You *must* believe me. I'm positive that Martin never *touched* that money.

FREDA (*eagerly*): I've always thought it queer that he should. It wasn't Martin's style at all that—doing some sneaky work with a cheque. I know he could be wild—and rather cruel sometimes. But he couldn't be a cautious cunning little sneak-thief. It wasn't his style at all. And he didn't care enough about money.

ROBERT: He spent enough of it. He was badly in debt, you know.

FREDA: Yes, but that's just the point. He didn't mind being in debt. He could have cheerfully gone on being in debt. Money simply didn't matter. Now *you* loathe being in debt. You're entirely different.

OLWEN: Yes, that was one of the reasons, I thought that you—

ROBERT: Yes, I see that. Though I think those fellows who don't care about money, who don't mind being in debt, are just the sort of fellows who help themselves to other people's.

FREDA: Yes, but not in a cautious sneaky way. That wasn't like Martin at all.

ROBERT (*pausing and thinking*): I wonder—Olwen, where did you get the idea that I'd taken it?

OLWEN: Why, because Martin himself was sure that you had taken it. He told me so.

ROBERT (*amazed*): Martin told you so?

OLWEN: Yes. That was the first thing we talked about.

ROBERT: Martin thought I had taken it! But he knew me better than that. Why should he have thought that?

FREDA: You thought he'd been the thief. You didn't know him any better, it seems.

ROBERT: Yes, but that's different. There were special circumstances. And I'd been told something. Besides, I wasn't at all sure. It wasn't until after he shot himself that I felt certain.

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OLWEN (*with growing excitement*): You say you'd been told something? But then Martin had been told something too. He'd practically been told that you'd taken that cheque.

ROBERT (*staring at her*): My God!

OLWEN: And do you know who told him that you'd taken the cheque?

ROBERT: I can guess now.

FREDA: Who?

ROBERT (*fiercely*): Stanton, wasn't it?

OLWEN: Yes, Stanton.

ROBERT: But Stanton told me that Martin had taken that cheque.

FREDA

(*together*): { Oh, but he——
My God, he——

OLWEN

ROBERT: He practically proved it to me. He said he didn't want Martin given away—said we'd all stand in together, all that sort of thing.

OLWEN: But don't you see—he told Martin all that too. And Martin would never have told me if he hadn't known—well, that I would never give you away.

ROBERT (*brooding*): Stanton.

FREDA (*with decision*): Then it was Stanton himself who got that money?

OLWEN: It looks like it.

FREDA (*now counsel for the prosecution*): I'm sure it was. And he's capable of it. You see, he played Martin and Robert off against one another. Could you have anything more *vile*?

ROBERT (*thoughtfully*): You know, it doesn't follow that Stanton himself was the thief.

FREDA: Of course he was.

ROBERT: Wait. Let's get this clear. Old Slater wanted some money and Mr. Whitehouse signed a bearer cheque for five hundred. Slater always insisted on bearer cheques—though God knows why. The cheque was on Mr. Whitehouse's desk. Slater didn't turn up the next morning, as he said he would, and when he did turn up, three days afterwards, the cheque wasn't there. Meanwhile it had been taken to the bank and cashed. And the bank wasn't the firm's usual place, because the cheque was on Mr. Whitehouse's private account. Only Stanton, Martin or I could have got at the cheque—except dear old Watson, who certainly didn't take it. And—this is the point—none of

us was known at this branch at all, but they said the fellow who cashed the cheque was about Martin's age or mine. They were rather vague, I gathered, but what they did remember of him certainly ruled out Stanton himself.

OLWEN: Mr. Whitehouse wouldn't have you identified at the bank, I remember.

FREDA: No, he was too fond of them all, and too hurt. He wasn't well at the time either.

ROBERT: I understood that he simply wanted the one who had taken the money to confess and then go.

OLWEN: He told me that too.

FREDA: Me too. Father was like that, of course. But what made you believe Martin had taken the cheque?

ROBERT: The evidence pointed to Martin and me, and I knew I hadn't taken it.

FREDA (*slowly*): And Stanton told you——?

ROBERT: Stanton told me he'd seen Martin coming out of your father's room.

OLWEN: Stanton told Martin he'd seen *you* coming out of that room.

FREDA (*very emphatically*): Stanton took that money himself.

ROBERT (*fiercely*): Whether he took the money or not, Stanton's got to explain this. (*Moves to door, opens it and snatches up the telephone receiver.*) No wonder he didn't approve of this business and was glad to get out of it. He's got too much to hide.

OLWEN (*sadly*): We'd all got too much to hide.

ROBERT: Then we'll let some daylight into it for once, if it kills us. Stanton's got to explain this. (*Telephoning.*) *Chantbury one two.*

FREDA: When?

ROBERT: To-night.

FREDA: Are you going to get them all back, Robert?

ROBERT: Yes. (*Telephoning.*) Hello, is that you, Gordon? . . . He is, is he? Well, I want you both to come back here. . . . Yes, more and more of it. . . . It's *darned* important. . . . Yes, we're all in it. Oh, no, of course not. We can keep Betty out of it. (*FREDA and OLWEN exchange glances.*) All right then. Be as quick as you can. (*Puts back receiver on table in hall, closes the door, switches on the light at doorway and says: "They're coming back," as the curtain begins to fall.*)

END OF ACT ONE

ACT II

ROBERT, FREDa and OLWEN are discovered in exactly the same positions as they were at the end of ACT I.

ROBERT: They're coming back.

FREDA: All of them?

ROBERT: No, not Betty. She's going to bed.

OLWEN (*with a touch of bitterness*): Wise little Betty.

ROBERT: I don't see why you should use that tone of voice, Olwen—as if Betty was cleverly dodging something. You know very well she's not mixed up in this business.

OLWEN: Do I?

ROBERT (*alarmed*): Well, don't you?

FREDA (*grimly amused*): Poor Robert, look at him now. This is really serious he's saying to himself. How we give ourselves away. It's a wonder we have any secrets at all.

ROBERT: No, but—hang it all, Olwen—you've no right to sneer at Betty like that. You know very well it's better to keep her out of all this.

OLWEN: No, we mustn't soil her pure young mind.

ROBERT: Well, after all, she's younger than we are—and she's terribly sensitive. You saw what happened to her just before they went. She couldn't stand the atmosphere of all this.

OLWEN: But that wasn't—

ROBERT: Obviously you dislike her, Olwen. I can't imagine why. She's always had a great admiration for you.

OLWEN (*frankly, not maliciously*): Well, I'm sorry, Robert, but I can't return her admiration—except for her looks. I don't dislike her. But—well, I can't be as sorry for her as I'd like to be or ought to be.

ROBERT (*annoyed by this*): You can't be sorry for her. Is it necessary for you or anybody else to be sorry for her? You're talking wildly now, Olwen.

FREDA (*in her best form*): I suspect not, Robert. And anyhow it seems to be our evening for talking wildly. Also, I'm now facing a most urgent problem, the sort of problem that only women have to face. If a man has been dragged back to your house to be told he's a

liar and a cad and a sneak and a possible thief, oughtn't you to make a few sandwiches for him?

ROBERT (*heavily*): He'll get no sandwiches from me.

FREDA (*mocking him*): No sincerity, no sandwiches—that's your motto, is it? No? Oh dear—how heavy we are without Martin. And how he would have adored all this. He'd have invented the most extravagant and incredible sins to confess to. Oh, don't look so dreadfully solemn, you two. You might be a bit brighter—just for a minute.

ROBERT (*heavily*): I'm afraid we haven't got your light touch, my dear Freda.

FREDA: I suppose I feel like this because, in spite of everything, I feel like a hostess expecting company, and I can't help thinking about bright remarks and sandwiches.

A bell rings out in the hall.

FREDA: And there they are. You'll have to let them in yourself, Robert.

ROBERT *goes out. As soon as the two women are left together the atmosphere changes. They speak in quick whispers.*

OLWEN: Have you really known a long time?

FREDA: Yes. More than a year. I've often wanted to say something to you about it.

OLWEN: What would you have said?

FREDA: I don't quite know. Something idiotic. But friendly, very friendly. (*Taking both her hands.*)

OLWEN: And I only guessed about you to-night, Freda. And now it all seems so obvious. I can't think why I never guessed before.

FREDA: Neither can I.

OLWEN: This is quite mad, isn't it?

FREDA: Quite mad. And rapidly getting madder. I don't care. Do you? It's rather a relief.

OLWEN: Yes it is—in a way. But it's rather frightening too. Like being in a car when the brakes are gone.

FREDA: And there are cross roads and corners ahead.

Noise of men outside. STANTON enters first.

STANTON (*as he enters*): I can't see why. I'm sorry about this, Freda, but it's Robert's doing. He insisted on our coming back.

FREDA (*coldly*): Well, I think Robert was right.

GORDON (*who has gone straight to settee and sprawled on it*): That's a change, anyhow. Well, what's it all about?

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ROBERT: Chiefly about that money.

GORDON (*disgusted*): Oh—hell—I thought as much. Why can't you leave poor Martin alone?

ROBERT: Wait a minute, Gordon. Martin didn't take that cheque.

GORDON (*leaping to his feet*): What. Is that true? Are you sure?

FREDA: Yes.

GORDON: You know, I never could understand that. It wasn't *like* Martin.

STANTON (*to FREDA and ROBERT*): Do you really believe that Martin didn't get that money? If he didn't, who did? And if he didn't, why did he shoot himself?

ROBERT (*very deliberately*): Stanton, we don't know. But we're hoping that you'll tell us.

STANTON (*with raised eyebrows*): Being funny, Robert?

ROBERT: Not a bit. I wouldn't have dragged you back here to be funny. You told me—didn't you—that you were practically certain that Martin took that cheque?

STANTON: Certainly I did. And I told you why I thought so. All the evidence pointed that way. And what happened afterwards proved that I was right.

ROBERT: Did it?

STANTON: Well, didn't it?

FREDA (*in a sudden flare of passion*): If it did, then why did you tell Martin that you thought Robert had done it?

STANTON (*uneasy*): Don't be ridiculous, Freda. Why should I tell Martin that I thought Robert had done it?

FREDA: Yes, why should you? That's what we want to know.

STANTON: But of course I didn't.

OLWEN (*quietly*): Yes, you did.

STANTON (*turning to her, despairingly*): Olwen! Are you in this too?

OLWEN: Yes, I'm in it too. Because you lied like that to Martin, telling him you were sure Robert took the cheque, you've given me hours and hours and hours of misery.

STANTON: But I never meant to, Olwen. How could I know that you would go and see Martin and that he would tell you?

OLWEN: It doesn't matter whether you knew or not. It was a mean vile lie. After this I feel that I never want to speak to you again.

STANTON: I'm sorry, Olwen. I'd rather anything had have happened than that. You do believe that, don't you? (*Looks at her appealingly but gets no response.*)

FREDA (*coldly, cuttingly*): Apparently the rest of us don't matter very much. But you owe us a few explanations.

ROBERT: You'd better stop lying now, Stanton. You've done enough. Why did you play off Martin and me against each other like that?

FREDA: There can only be one explanation. Because he took that cheque himself.

GORDON (*fiercely*): My God—you didn't, did you, Stanton?

STANTON: Yes, I did.

GORDON (*excitedly, and rushing over to STANTON with threatening gestures*): Then you're a rotten swine, Stanton. I don't care about the money. But you let Martin take the blame. You let everybody think he was a thief.

STANTON: Don't be such a hysterical young fool. (*Pushing GORDON away.*)

ROBERT: Shut up, Gordon.

STANTON: Keep quiet and stop waving your hands at me. We don't want this to develop into a free fight.

GORDON: But you let——

STANTON: I didn't let Martin take the blame, as you call it. He wasn't the sort to take the blame, and you ought to know that. It happened that in the middle of all the fuss about this money, he went and shot himself. You all jumped to the conclusion that it was because he had taken the money and was afraid of being found out. I let you go on thinking it, that's all. You might as well think he shot himself for that as for anything else. And anyhow he was done with it, out of it. Besides—where he's gone to, it doesn't matter a damn whether people here think you've stolen five hundred pounds or not.

ROBERT: But you deliberately tried to fasten the blame on to Martin or me.

FREDA: Of course he did. That's what makes it so foul.

STANTON: Not really. I'd not the least intention of letting anybody else be punished for what I'd done. I was only playing for time. I took that cheque because I'd got to have some money quickly and I didn't know where to turn. I knew I could square it up in a week, and I knew too that if necessary I could make it all right with old Slater, who's a sportsman. But when it all came out, I'd got to play for time, and that seemed to me the easiest way of doing it.

ROBERT: But you couldn't have cashed the cheque at the bank yourself?

STANTON: No, I got somebody else to do that—a fellow who could

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ROBERT: That's true. The less you say now, the better.

STANTON (*harshly*): The less we all say, the better. You should have thought of that before. I told you as much before you began dragging all this stuff out. Like a fool, you wouldn't leave well alone.

ROBERT: Anyway, I've cleared Martin's name.

STANTON: You've cleared nothing yet, and if you'd a glimmer of sense you'd see it. But now I don't give a damn. You're going to get all you ask for.

FREDA (*still furious*): One of the things we shall ask for is to be rid of you.

GORDON: Do you think you'll stay on with the firm after this?

STANTON: I don't know and I don't care.

FREDA: You did a year ago.

STANTON: Yes, but now I don't. I can get along better now without the firm than they can without me.

GORDON: Well, after this, at least it will be a pleasure to try. You always hated Martin, and I knew it.

STANTON: I had my reasons. Unlike the Whitehouse family—father, daughter and son—who all fell in love with him.

ROBERT (*slowly*): Does that mean anything, Stanton? If it doesn't, just take it back—now. If it does, you'll kindly explain yourself.

STANTON: I'll take nothing back.

OLWEN (*coming between them*): Stanton—please. Don't let's have any more of this. We've all said too much already.

STANTON (*turning to her*): I'm sorry, Olwen. But you can't blame me.

ROBERT (*with cold deliberation*): I'm waiting for your explanation.

FREDA: Don't you see, it's me he's getting at.

ROBERT: Is that true, Stanton?

STANTON: I'm certainly not leaving her out.

ROBERT: Be careful.

STANTON: It's too late to be careful. Why do you think Freda's been so angry with me? There's only one reason, and I've known it for a long time. She was in love with Martin.

FREDA gives a cry. ROBERT stares at FREDA, then at STANTON, then at her again.

ROBERT (*going to FREDA and standing behind her*): Is that true, Freda? I must know, because if it isn't I'm going to kick Stanton out of this house.

STANTON: Don't talk like a man in a melodrama, Caplan. I wouldn't have said it if I hadn't known it was true. Whether she admits it or not is another matter. But even if she doesn't admit it, you're not going to kick me out of the house. I'll go in the ordinary way, thank you.

ROBERT: Freda, is it true?

FREDA (*her last defence gone*): Yes.

ROBERT (*who speaks as if they were alone*): Has that been the trouble all along?

FREDA: Yes. All along.

ROBERT: When did it begin?

FREDA: A long time ago. Or it seems a long time ago. Ages.

ROBERT: Before we were married?

FREDA: Yes. I thought I could—break it—then. I did for a little time. But it came back, worse than ever.

ROBERT: I wish you'd told me. Why didn't you tell me?

FREDA: I wanted to. Hundreds of times I seem to have tried to. I've said the opening words to myself—you know—and sometimes I've hardly known whether I didn't actually say them out loud to you.

ROBERT: I wish you had, I wish you had. But why didn't I see it for myself? It seems plain enough now. I must have been a fool. I know now when it began. It was when we were all down at Tintagel that summer.

FREDA: Yes, it began then. Tintagel, that lovely, lovely summer. Nothing's ever been quite real since then.

ROBERT: Martin went away walking, and you said you'd stay a few days with the Hutchinsons. Was that——?

FREDA (*very quietly*): Yes, Martin and I spent that little time together, of course. It was the only time we did really spend together. It didn't mean much to him—a sort of experiment, that's all.

ROBERT: But didn't Martin care?

FREDA (*in great distress*): No, not really. If he had have done, it would have been all so simple. That's why I never told you. And I thought when we were married, it would be—different. It wasn't fair to you, I know, but I thought it would be all right. And so did Martin. But it wasn't. You know that too. It was hopeless. But you don't know how hopeless it was—for me.

ROBERT: But why didn't Martin himself tell me? He knew how unhappy I was.

FREDA: He couldn't. He was rather afraid of you.

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ROBERT: Martin afraid of me!

GORDON: Yes, he was.

ROBERT: Nonsense. He wasn't afraid of anybody—and certainly not of me.

FREDA: Yes, he was, in some queer way.

OLWEN (*very gently*): That's true, Robert. He was. I knew that.

GORDON: So did I. He told me that when you're really angry, you'll stop at nothing.

ROBERT (*brooding*): Queer. I never knew Martin felt like that. And it was he who—I wonder why? What was it? (*To FREDA*.) It couldn't have been—this—

FREDA: No, no. He didn't care. (*Breaks down completely*.) Oh, Martin, Martin—

OLWEN (*going to FREDA and putting her arms round her*): Freda, Freda—don't.

STANTON (*while OLWEN is still comforting FREDA*): That's how it goes on, you see, Caplan. A good evening's work this.

ROBERT: I'm not regretting it. I'm glad all this has come out. I wish to God I'd known earlier, that's all.

STANTON: What difference would it have made? You couldn't have done anything.

ROBERT: To begin with, I'd have known the truth. And then something might have been done about it. I wouldn't have stood in their way.

STANTON (*sardonically*): You didn't stand in their way.

GORDON (*on whom all this is having a very bad effect*): No, it was Martin himself, you see. He didn't care, as Freda says. I knew. He told me about it. (*At FREDA*.)

ROBERT (*turning, and incredulously*): He told you?

GORDON: Yes.

ROBERT: Freda's brother?

FREDA (*pushing OLWEN aside and looking up*): Gordon, I don't believe you.

GORDON (*hotly*): Why should I lie about it? Martin told me. He used to tell me everything.

FREDA: Rubbish. He thought you were a little nuisance—always hanging about him.

GORDON: That's not true.

FREDA: It is. He told me so, that—that very last Saturday, when I took him the cigarette box. He told me then, you'd stayed the night

before at the cottage and that he'd had to do everything he could to get rid of you.

GORDON (*plunging now into a quarrel*): Freda—you're making this up, every word about me, I know you are. Martin would never have said that about me. He knew how fond I was of him, and he was fond of me too, in his own way.

FREDA: He wasn't.

GORDON: You're just saying this because you're jealous.

FREDA: I'm not.

GORDON: You've always been jealous of Martin's interest in me.

FREDA (*hotly*): Gordon, that's simply a disgusting lie.

GORDON: It isn't.

FREDA: It is. He told me himself how tired he was of your hanging about him and suddenly becoming hysterical. I see what he meant now. Every time he's been mentioned to-night, you've been hysterical. What are you trying to persuade me into believing you are? (*Putting her hands to her head and turning away.*)

ROBERT (*sharply*): Freda, you're mad.

GORDON (*shrilly, in a rage and turning to ROBERT*): It's all jealousy, jealousy. If he'd thought I was a nuisance, Martin wouldn't have kept asking me down to the cottage. (*Turning to FREDA.*) But he was tired of *you*, pestering him and worrying him all the time. He didn't care for women. He was sick of them. He told me so. He wanted me to tell you, so that you'd leave him alone.

FREDA (*wildly*): You're making me feel sick.

GORDON: Well, you just leave me——

OLWEN (*distressed and pushing GORDON away*): Stop it. Stop it, both of you.

STANTON (*grimly*): Let them have it out. They might as well, now they've started.

GORDON (*to FREDA*): And I was going to tell you too. Only then—he killed himself.

FREDA: I don't believe it. I don't believe it. Martin couldn't have been so cruel.

GORDON (*close to her*): Couldn't he? What did he say to you that afternoon when you took him the cigarette box?

FREDA: What does it matter what he said? You're just making up these abominable lies——

ROBERT (*roughly*): Look here, I'm not having any more of this. You're like a pair of lunatics—screaming at each other like that over a

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dead man. I understand about you, Freda, and I'm sorry—but for God's sake keep quiet about it now. I can't stand any more. As for you, Gordon—you must be tight or something——

GORDON (*sulking*): I'm not. I'm as sober as you are.

ROBERT: Well, behave as if you were. You're not a child. I know Martin was a friend of yours——

GORDON (*turning on ROBERT hotly and scornfully*): Friend of mine! He wasn't a friend of mine. You talk like a fish. Martin was the only person on earth I really cared about. I couldn't help it. There it was. I'd have done anything for him. Five hundred pounds. My God, I'd have stolen five thousand pounds from the firm if Martin had asked me to. He was the most marvellous person I'd ever known. Sometimes I tried to hate him. Sometimes he gave me a hell of a time. But it didn't really matter. He was Martin, and I'd rather be with him, even if he was just jeering at me all the time, than be with anybody else I've ever known. I'm like Freda—since he died, I haven't really cared a damn, I've just been passing the time. He didn't really care for women at all. He tried to amuse himself with them, but he really distrusted them, disliked them. He told me so, many a time. Martin told me everything. And that was the finest thing that ever happened to me. And now you can call me any name you like, I don't care.

There is a silence, and he looks at them all defiantly.

ROBERT: But what about Betty?

GORDON (*sullenly*): You can leave her out of this.

ROBERT: I want to. But I can't help thinking about her.

GORDON: Well, you needn't. She can look after herself.

ROBERT: That's just what she can't do and she oughtn't to have to do. You ought to see that.

GORDON: Well, I don't see it. And I know Betty better than you do.

FREDA (*bitterly*): You know everybody better than anybody else does, don't you?

GORDON: You would say that, wouldn't you? I can't help it if Martin liked me better than he liked you.

FREDA: How do you know that he——

OLWEN: Oh, stop that. Stop it, both of you. Can't you see that Martin was making mischief, just to amuse himself?

GORDON (*sulkily*): No, I can't. He wasn't like that.

STANTON (*with irony*): Oh no. Not at all like that. You couldn't ask for a quiet, simpler, more sincere fellow.

FREDA (*hotly*): Nobody's going to pretend he was that. But at

least he didn't steal money and then try to put the blame on other people.

STANTON: We could all start talking like that, you know, Freda. Just throwing things at each other's heads. But I suggest we don't.

OLWEN: I agree. But I do want Freda and Gordon to understand that it's simply madness quarrelling over anything Martin ever said to them. He was a born mischief-maker and as cruel as a cat. That's one of the reasons why I disliked him so much.

ROBERT: Disliked him?

OLWEN: Yes, I'm sorry, Robert, but I didn't like Martin. I detested him. You ought to have seen that.

STANTON: I saw it. And you were quite right. I'm afraid you always are, OLWEN.

OLWEN: No, I'm not.

STANTON: I'd trust your judgment.

ROBERT: So would I, for that matter.

OLWEN: No. No.

STANTON: And you're the only one of us who will come out of this as sound as you went in.

OLWEN (*embarrassed and a little alarmed*): No, that's not true.

GORDON: No—it was Olwen and that damned cigarette box that began the whole business.

STANTON: Oh, that was nothing. I knew about that all along.

OLWEN: You knew about what?

STANTON: I knew you'd been to see Martin Caplan that Saturday night.

OLWEN (*alarmed*): You knew?

STANTON: Yes.

OLWEN: But how could you? I don't understand.

STANTON: I was spending that week-end at my own cottage. You remember that garage, where the road forks? You stopped there that night for some petrol.

OLWEN (*remembering*): Yes, I believe I did.

STANTON: They told me, and said you'd taken the Fallows End road, and so I knew you must have been going to see Martin. You couldn't have been going anywhere else, could you? Quite simple.

OLWEN (*staring at him*): And you've known all this time?

STANTON: Yes. All this time.

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ROBERT (*rather bitterly*): I suppose, Stanton, it's no use asking *you* why you've never said a word about it?

STANTON (*coolly*): I'm afraid not. I think I've done my share in the confession box to-night.

GORDON: Well, I wish I'd known a bit more, that's all. There was I dragged into that foul inquest. Did I know this? Did I know that? My God—and all the time I wasn't the last person he'd talked to at all. Freda had been there some time in the afternoon, And Olwen was there that very night, at the very moment—for all we know.

STANTON: Don't talk rubbish.

GORDON: Well, is it rubbish? (*Indicating OLWEN, who turns away and moves up to the window.*) After all, what do we know? What was Olwen doing there?

ROBERT: She's told us that. She was there to talk to Martin about the money.

GORDON: And how far does that take us?

STANTON: What do you mean by that?

FREDA: He means—I imagine—that Olwen hasn't told us very much so far. We know she went to Martin to talk to him about the missing money. And we know that Martin thought Robert had taken it and that she thought so too. And that's all we do know.

GORDON: Yes, we don't know how long she was there or what Martin said to her, or anything. It's a good job *she* wasn't pushed in front of that coroner or they'd have had it out of her in no time. (*Turning round to OLWEN.*) I think it's up to *her* to tell us a little more.

STANTON: Well, there's no need to sound so damned vindictive about it.

OLWEN, *who has just looked out through the window, pulling the curtain back a little, suddenly starts back and gives a little scream.*

ROBERT }
STANTON } (*together*): Hello, what's the matter?

ROBERT *goes up to window, looks out, and FREDA rises and turns to window.*

ROBERT (*still looking out*): There's nobody there now.

OLWEN: No, they darted away. But I'll swear there was somebody. They'd been listening.

STANTON (*who has remained seated. Grimly*): Well, they couldn't have chosen a better night for it.

ROBERT: It's impossible, Olwen. And there isn't a sign of anybody.

GORDON: Thank the Lord for that.

They all start to move forward and as they move, there are several short rings of a door bell heard from off. They all stop and look at one another in surprise and consternation.

ROBERT: Who on earth can this be?

FREDA: Don't ask me. I haven't the least idca. Go and see.

ROBERT: Yes, I know. But we don't want anybody interrupting us now.

FREDA: Well, don't let them interrupt us, whoever they are. But you'll have to see who it is.

The bells rings again and ROBERT goes out. While he is away, nobody speaks and they all look somewhat constrained.

Then the voices of ROBERT and BETTY can be heard.

ROBERT (*heard outside*): But we haven't, I tell you. You've never been mentioned.

BETTY (*outside*): I know you have. I can feel it. That's why I had to come back.

ROBERT (*outside*): I tell you we haven't.

ROBERT opens the door and BETTY is seen in front of him.

GORDON: I thought you'd gone to bed, Betty. What's the matter?

BETTY (*just inside the door*): You're talking about me, all of you. (*Looking round at them all.*) I know you are. I wanted to go to bed. I started to go. And then I couldn't. I knew you were all talking about me. I couldn't stand it. I had to come back.

FREDA (*coldly*): Well, you were wrong. As a matter of fact, you're the one person we *haven't* been talking about.

BETTY (*looking at GORDON, STANTON and then ROBERT*): Is that true?

ROBERT: Yes, of course.

OLWEN: You were outside just now, weren't you? Outside the window, listening.

BETTY (*confused*): No, I wasn't listening. I was trying to peep in, to see exactly who was here and what you all looked like. You see, I was sure you were all saying things about me. And I meant to go to bed and I was tired but I felt too excited inside to sleep and so I took three of those tablets I have to make me sleep and now I feel absolutely dopey. God knows what I shall be saying in a minute. You mustn't mind me. (*Sinks into the chair.*)

ROBERT (*leaning over her*): I'm so sorry, Betty. Can I get you anything? (*As she shakes her head.*) Sure? (*She shakes her head again.*) And not a word's been said about you. In fact, we all wanted to keep you out of this. It's all rather unpleasant.

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FREDA (*with irony*): But seeing that Betty has married into one of the families concerned, I think she ought not to be too carefully protected from the sordid truth.

ROBERT (*losing his temper*): Oh shut up, Freda.

FREDA: I won't. Why should I? I thought we should see a different Robert now.

ROBERT: After what you've said to night, I can't see that it matters much to you how different I may be.

FREDA: Perhaps not, but I still like reasonably decent manners.

ROBERT: Then set us an example.

GORDON: Oh, shut up, both of you.

BETTY: But what have you been talking about then?

GORDON: It began about the money.

BETTY: You mean that Martin took?

GORDON: Martin didn't take it. We know that now. Stanton took that money. He's admitted it.

BETTY *gives a short cry*.

BETTY: Admitted it. Stanton? Oh surely—it's impossible.

STANTON (*sardonically*): It sounds impossible, doesn't it, Betty, but it isn't. I'm sorry to go down with such a bump in your estimation, my dear Betty, but this is our night for telling the truth, and I've had to admit that I took the money. Terrible, isn't it?

STANTON *looks at BETTY and she avoids his glance, uncomfortably*. ROBERT *looks from one to the other of them*.

ROBERT: What did you mean by that, Stanton?

STANTON: I meant what I said. I nearly always do.

ROBERT: Why did you use that tone of voice to Betty?

STANTON: Perhaps—because I think that Betty has not a very high opinion of me—and so need not have sounded so surprised and shocked.

ROBERT (*slowly*): I don't quite understand that.

FREDA (*sarcastically*): I'm sure you don't, Robert.

ROBERT (*turning on her sharply*): Do you?

FREDA (*sweetly*): Yes, I think so.

BETTY: But if Martin didn't take the money—then why—why—did he shoot himself?

GORDON: That's what we want to know. Olwen saw him last of all, that very evening, and she knew he hadn't taken the money, but that's all she's told us.

OLWEN: I've told you that he thought Robert had taken the money.

ROBERT: And that was enough—in the state he was in then—to throw him clean off his balance. All that stuff about his merely being amused is nonsense. That was just his bluff. Martin hated anybody to think he was really moved or alarmed by anything.

GORDON: That's true.

ROBERT (*with growing excitement*): And he depended on me. He used to laugh a lot at me, but that was nothing. He depended on me. You've told me yourselves—that he was secretly rather frightened of me. It was because Martin had a respect for me. He thought I was the solid steady one. I was one of the very few people he had a respect for. I tell you, it must have been a hell of a shock to poor Martin.

OLWEN: I don't think it was, Robert.

STANTON: Neither do I.

ROBERT: But neither of you knew him as I did. What's the good of talking. He was in a wretched state, all run down and neurotic, and when he heard that I'd taken the cheque he must have felt that there was nobody left he could depend on, that I'd let him down. He'd probably been brooding over it day and night—he was that sort. He wouldn't let you see it, Olwen. But it would be there all the time, giving him hell. Oh, what a fool I was.

GORDON: You!

ROBERT: Yes, of course. I ought to have gone straight to Martin and told him what Stanton had told me.

GORDON: If this is true, then the person really responsible is Stanton.

FREDA: Yes,

STANTON: Rubbish.

FREDA: It isn't. Don't you see what you did?

STANTON: No, because I don't believe it.

GORDON: No, because you don't choose to, that's all.

STANTON: Oh, talk sense. Can't you see Martin had his own reasons?

ROBERT: No. What drove Martin to suicide was my stupidity and your damned lying, Stanton.

BETTY (*bursting into tears*): Oh!

ROBERT: Oh, sorry, Betty—but this has got to be settled, once and for all.

STANTON (*grimly*): You're none of you in a state to settle anything.

ROBERT: Listen to me, Stanton——

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STANTON: Oh, drop it, man.

GORDON: You've got to answer.

ROBERT: I'll never forgive you for telling Martin what you did—by God, I won't!

STANTON: You've got it all wrong.

GORDON: They haven't, you rotten liar. (*Moves as if to strike him.*)

STANTON (*pushing him aside*): Oh, get out.

GORDON (*shouting and about to go for him again*): You made Martin shoot himself.

OLWEN: Wait a minute, Gordon. (*Everybody turns and looks at her.*) Martin didn't shoot himself.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT III

All are discovered in exactly the same positions as they were in at the end of Act II.

OLWEN: Martin didn't shoot himself.

FREDA: Martin didn't——

OLWEN: Of course he didn't. I shot him.

BETTY gives a little scream, the others gasp and stare.

ROBERT: That's ridiculous, Olwen. You couldn't have done.

GORDON: Is this your idea of a joke?

OLWEN: I wish it was. *(Suddenly sits down and buries her face in her hands. She does not make any sound, however.)*

GORDON: Olwen!

ROBERT *(with lowered voice)*: She must be hysterical or something. I believe people often confess to all sorts of mad things in that state, things they could not possibly have done.

STANTON *(shaking his head)*: Olwen's not hysterical. She means it.

BETTY *(in a whisper)*: But she can't mean—she murdered him. Can she?

STANTON *(gently)*: You might as well tell us exactly what happened now, Olwen, if you can stand it. And I might as well tell you—before you begin—that I'm not at all surprised. I suspected it was you at the first.

OLWEN *(staring at him)*: You suspected I'd done it? But why?

STANTON: For three reasons. The first was that I couldn't understand why Martin should shoot himself. You see, I knew he hadn't taken the money, and though he was in every kind of mess, he didn't seem to me the sort of chap who'd get out of it that way. Then I knew you'd been with him quite late, because—as I said before—I'd been told you'd gone that way. And the third reason—well, that'll keep. You'd better tell us what happened now. It was an accident, wasn't it?

OLWEN *(in a low, strained voice)*: Yes, it was really an accident. I'll tell you what happened, but I can't go into details. It's all too muddled and horrible. But I'll tell you the complete truth. I won't hide anything more, I promise you. I think we'd all better tell everything we know now, really speak our minds.

ROBERT *(also in a low voice)*: I agree.

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STANTON: Wait a minute, Olwen. Will you have a drink before you begin?

OLWEN: I'll just have a little soda water, if you don't mind.
He pours out drink and gives it to her.

ROBERT: Sit here.

OLWEN (*to STANTON*): Thank you. (*Sips drink.*) (*To ROBERT*) No, I'll sit by the fire.

OLWEN: I went to see Martin that Saturday night, as you know, to talk to him about the missing money. Mr. Whitehouse had told me about it. He thought that either Martin or Robert must have taken it. I gathered it was more likely Robert. So I went to see Martin. I didn't like Martin and he knew it, but he knew, too, what I felt about Robert, and after all, he was Robert's brother. He believed that Robert had taken the money, and he wasn't a bit worried about it. I'm sorry, Robert, but he wasn't. I hated him for that, too. He was rather maliciously amused. The good brother fallen at last—that sort of thing.

FREDA (*in a low, bitter voice*): I can believe that. I hate to, but I know he could be like that sometimes. He was that day.

OLWEN (*gently*): You found that, too, that day?

FREDA: Yes, he was in one of his worst moods. He could be cruel—torturing—sometimes.

OLWEN: I've never seen him as bad as he was that night. He wasn't really sane.

ROBERT (*shocked*): Olwen!

OLWEN (*very gently*): I'm sorry, Robert. I didn't want you to know all this, but there's no help for it now. You see, Martin had been taking some sort of drug—

ROBERT: Drug? Do you mean dope stuff?

OLWEN: Yes. He'd had a lot of it.

ROBERT: Are you sure? I can't believe it.

STANTON: It's true, Caplan. I knew it.

GORDON: So did I. He made me try some once, but I didn't like it. It just made me feel rather sick.

ROBERT: When was this?

GORDON: You remember when he went to Berlin and how nervy he was just then?

STANTON: Yes, I remember.

GORDON: Well, a fellow he met there put him on to it—some new

drug that a lot of the literary and theatrical set were doping themselves with——

FREDA: But did Martin——

GORDON: Yes. He liked it and took more and more of it.

ROBERT: But where did he get it?

GORDON: Through some German he knew in town. When he couldn't get it, he was pretty rotten. Not so bad as those dope fiends one reads about, you know, but nevertheless pretty rotten.

STANTON: But didn't you try to stop him?

GORDON: Of course—but he only laughed. I don't blame him really. None of you can understand what life was like to Martin—he was so sensitive and nervy. He was one of those people who are meant to be happy.

STANTON (*grimly*): We're all those people who are meant to be happy. Martin's no exception.

ROBERT: Yes, that's true. But I know what Gordon means.

FREDA: You couldn't help knowing what he means, if you knew Martin. There was no sort of middle state, no easy jog-trot with him. Either he had to be gay—and when he was gay, he was gayer than anybody else in the world—or he was intensely miserable.

BETTY (*impulsively*): I'm like that. Everybody is—aren't they?—except old and stuffy people.

ROBERT: But what about this drug, Olwen?

OLWEN: He took some—it was in little white tablets—while I was there, and it had a horrible effect on him. It gave him a sort of devilish gaiety. I can see him now. His eyes were queer. Oh—he really wasn't sane. (*Stops.*)

ROBERT: What happened?

OLWEN (*quiet, but very agitated*): It's horrible to talk about. I've tried not to think about it. He knew I disliked him, but he couldn't believe I *really* disliked him. He was frightfully conceited about himself. He seemed to think that everybody young, male or female, ought to be falling in love with him. He saw himself as a sort of Pan, you know.

FREDA (*in a low voice*): Yes, he did. And he'd every reason to.

OLWEN: He began taunting me. He thought of me—or pretended to—as a priggish spinster, full of repressions, who'd never really lived. All rubbish, because I'm really not that type at all. But he pretended to think I was, and kept telling me that my dislike of him showed that I was trying to repress a great fascination he had for me. And of course that all these repressions were bad for me. I'd never lived, never

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would live, and all the rest of it. He talked a lot about that. I ought to have run out and left him, but I felt I couldn't while he was in that state. In a way I was sorry for him, because really he was ill, sick in mind and body, and I thought perhaps I could calm him down. I might dislike him, but after all he wasn't a stranger. He was one of our own set, mixed up with most of the people I liked best in the world. I tried hard to stop him. But everything I said seemed to make him worse. I suppose it would when he was in that excited, abnormal state. Well, he talked about my repressions, and when I pretended to laugh at him, he got more and more excited. And then he tried to show me some beastly foul drawings he had—horrible, obscene things by some mad Belgian artist——

FREDA (*swaying*): Oh—my God! (*Sobs.*)

OLWEN (*going to her*): Oh, Freda, I'm so sorry. Please forgive me. I know how this must be hurting you.

FREDA (*distraught*): Martin. Martin.

OLWEN: Don't listen to any more. I'll stop if you like. Or go and lie down.

FREDA: I couldn't. Oh—he wasn't like that really. If you'd known him as I'd known him—before.

OLWEN: I know that. We all do. He was different. He was ill.

FREDA (*in a muffled tone*): Go on, Olwen.

ROBERT: Yes, Olwen. You can't stop now.

OLWEN: There isn't a lot to tell now. When I pushed his beastly drawings away and was rather indignant about them, he got still more excited, completely unbalanced, and shouted out things about my repressions. And then I found he was telling me to take my clothes off. I told him not to be a fool and that I was going. But then he stood between me and the door. And he had a revolver in his hand and was shouting something about danger and terror and love. He wasn't threatening me with it or himself. He was just waving it about—being dramatic. I didn't even believe it was loaded. But by this time I'd had more than enough of him—I couldn't be sorry for him any more—and I told him to get out of the way. When he wouldn't, I tried to push him out of the way. And then we had a struggle. (*She is distressed now and a trifle incoherent.*) He tried to tear my clothes. We really fought one another. It was horrible. He wasn't any stronger than I was. (*Illustrating this by grabbing her own wrist and slowly turning it.*) I'd grabbed the hand with the revolver in it. I'd turned the revolver towards him. His finger must have been on the trigger. I must have given it a jerk. (*Covers her face with her hands.*) The revolver went off. Oh—horrible—horrible! I've tried and tried to forget that. If he'd just

been wounded, I'm sure I would have stopped with him—even though I was in such a panic. But he wasn't. He was dead.

ROBERT: Yes, we understand that. You needn't tell us.

OLWEN: When I realised what had happened I rushed out in a dreadful panic and sat in my car outside for I don't know how long. I couldn't move a finger. There was nobody about. It was fairly late and you know how lonely that cottage was. I just sat on and on in the car, shivering, and it was so quiet in the cottage, so horribly quiet. I've gone through that over and over again. (*Buries her face in her hands and sobs soundlessly.*)

BETTY (*in a whisper and turning her head away*): God!

ROBERT: You can't be blamed, Olwen.

STANTON (*decisively, and rising*): Of course she can't be blamed. And there must never be a word spoken about this—not to anybody. We must all promise that.

They all nod or murmur their assent.

GORDON (*bitterly*): It's a pity we can't all be as cool and business-like about this as you are, Stanton.

STANTON: I don't feel very cool and business-like about it. But you see, it's not as big a surprise to me as it is to you people. I guessed long ago that something like this had happened.

ROBERT: But it looked so much like suicide that nobody bothered to suggest it wasn't. It never seemed to me to be anything else. All the evidence pointed that way. I can't think how you could have guessed even though you knew Olwen had been there.

STANTON: I told you I had a third reason. I was over fairly early next morning—the postmistress at Fallows End rang me up—and I was there before anybody but the village constable and the doctor. And I spotted something on the floor that the village bobby had missed, and I picked it up when he wasn't looking. I've kept it in my pocket-book ever since. (*Brings out pocket-book and produces from it a small square of patterned silk.*) I'm rather observant about such things.

OLWEN: Let me see. (*Examines it.*) Yes, that's a piece of the dress I was wearing. It was torn in the struggle we had. So that's how you knew?

STANTON (*dropping piece of silk in the fireplace*): That's how I knew.

OLWEN: But why didn't you say anything?

GORDON (*bitterly*): I can tell you that. He didn't say anything because he wanted everybody to think that Martin had shot himself. You see, that meant that Martin must have taken the money.

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ROBERT (*wearily*): That's about it, I suppose. It falls into line with everything we've heard from him to-night.

STANTON: No, there happened to be another reason, much more important. I knew that if Olwen had had a hand in Martin's death, then something like that must have happened, and so Olwen couldn't be blamed. I knew her better than any of you—or I felt I did. And I trusted her. She's about the only person I would trust. She knows all about that. I've told her often enough. She's not interested, but there it is.

OLWEN (*wonderingly*): And you never even hinted to me that you knew.

STANTON: Surprising, isn't it? What a chance I missed to capture your interest for a few minutes. But I couldn't take that line with you. I suppose even nowadays, when we're all so damned tough, there has got to be one person that you behave to always as if you were Sir Roger de Coverly, and with me you've been that person for a long time now. And I knew all along that you were saying nothing because you thought Robert here had taken the money and that he was safe after everybody put it down to Martin. And that didn't always make it any easier for me.

BETTY (*with shrill irony*): No? What a shame! But what a fine romantic character you are, aren't you?

ROBERT (*gently*): Steady, Betty. You don't understand.

FREDA (*bitterly*): How could she?

BETTY (*indignantly, and turning to FREDA*): Why do you say that—in that tone of voice?

FREDA (*wearily*): Why does one say anything—in any tone of voice?

OLWEN (*to STANTON*): You know, I nearly did take you into my confidence. And that might have made a difference. But I chose a bad moment.

STANTON (*eagerly*): Why? When was this? Tell me.

OLWEN: I told you I sat in my car that night for some time not able to do anything. But then, when I felt a little better, I felt I had to tell somebody, and you were the nearest person——

STANTON (*alarmed*): But you didn't go there—that night?

OLWEN (*quietly*): Yes, I did. I drove over to your cottage at Church Marley that very Saturday night. I got there about eleven o'clock or just afterwards. I left my car at the bottom of that tiny narrow lane and walked up to your cottage. And then—I walked back again.

STANTON: You walked up to the cottage?

OLWEN: Yes, yes—don't be stupid about it, please, Stanton. I walked right up to your cottage and saw enough to set me walking straight back again.

STANTON: So that's when you came. After that, it was hopeless, I suppose.

OLWEN: Quite hopeless. I think that added the last touch to that night. I don't think I've ever felt the same about people—not just here, but everybody, even the people who walk into the office or sit opposite one in buses and trains—since that night. I know that's stupid, but I couldn't help it. And (*forcing a smile*) you must all have noticed that I've been completely off country cottages.

FREDA (*maliciously*): Yes, even Betty's noticed that.

BETTY *bursts into tears and bangs her head.*

ROBERT: Why, what's the matter, Betty?

GORDON: What a little liar you are, Betty.

BETTY (*in muffled voice*): Haven't we all been liars?

ROBERT (*puzzled*): But you haven't, Betty.

GORDON: Oh, don't be a fool, Robert. Of course she has. She's lied like fury.

ROBERT: What about?

FREDA: Why don't you ask her?

OLWEN (*wearily*): Oh, what does it matter. Leave the child alone.

BETTY: I'm not a child. That's the mistake you've all made.

ROBERT (*who has been thinking*): Not you—and Stanton? (*A pause. She does not reply.*) Is that what they mean? (*BETTY just keeps still and looks defiant.*) Why don't you tell them it's ridiculous?

FREDA (*contemptuously*): How can she? Don't be absurd.

OLWEN (*gently*): You see, Robert, I saw them both in Stanton's cottage that night.

ROBERT: I'm sorry, Olwen, but I won't take even your word for this. Besides, there are other possible explanations.

STANTON: Oh, drop this, Caplan. We've had too much of it already. I'm going.

ROBERT (*ferociously turning on him*): You're not going.

STANTON: Don't be a fool. It's no business of yours.

FREDA (*maliciously*): That's where you're wrong, Stanton. This is where Robert's business really begins.

ROBERT: I'm waiting for an answer, Betty.

BETTY (*frightened*): What do you want me to say?

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ROBERT: Were you with Stanton at his cottage?

BETTY (*whispers*): Yes.

ROBERT: Were you his mistress?

BETTY: Yes. (*Turns away and drops her head.*)

ROBERT (*quietly but with great passion. Turning to STANTON*): My God, I could— (*A pause, then turns to BETTY, in extreme agitation.*) But why—why—in God's name—why? How could you? How could you?

BETTY (*suddenly stung into life*): How could I? Because I'm not a child and I'm not a little stuffed doll, that's why. You would drag all this out and now you can damned well have it. Yes, I stayed with Stanton that night, and I've stayed with him other nights. And he's not in love with me and I know it, and I'm not in love with him. I wouldn't marry him if I could. But I'd got to make something happen. Gordon was driving me mad. If you want to call someone a child, then call him one, for that's all he is. This damned marriage of ours that you all got so sentimental about is the biggest sham there's ever been. It isn't a marriage at all. It's just nothing—pretence, pretence, pretence. Betty darling and Gordon darling, when all the time he's mooning over his Martin and the very sight of him makes me want to scream. (*Her voice now had become a shriek.*)

FREDA: Betty, you mustn't go—

BETTY: It's not my fault. I was in love with him when we were married, and I thought everything was going to be marvellous. I wouldn't have looked at anybody else if he'd been—real. But he just isn't there. He can't even *talk* to me.

GORDON: For God's sake, shut up, Betty.

BETTY (*with shrill emphasis*): I won't shut up. They want to know the truth, and they can have it. I don't care. I've had nothing, nothing out of my marriage but shame and misery.

OLWEN: Betty, that's simply nonsense.

BETTY: If I were the nice little doll you all thought me, perhaps it wouldn't have mattered. But I'm not. I'm not a child either. I'm a woman. And Stanton was the one person who guessed what was happening and treated me like a woman.

GORDON (*scornfully*): I wouldn't have blamed you if you'd gone and fallen in love properly with someone, but this was just a low sordid intrigue, a dirty little affair, not worth all your silly lies. I suppose Stanton was the rich uncle in America who kept giving you all those fine presents?

BETTY: Yes, he was. You couldn't even be generous though you'd

have given your precious Martin everything we'd got. I knew Stanton didn't really care for me, so I got what I could out of him. (STANTON *turns to her and gives an amused grin mixed with surprise.*) It served you right. Men who say they're in love with one woman and keep spending their week-ends with another deserve all they get.

FREDA (*to STANTON*): Is that why you suddenly found yourself so short of money that you had to have that five hundred pounds?

STANTON: Yes. Queer how it works out, isn't it?

GORDON: Then Betty is responsible for everything, for all this misery, for Martin.

BETTY (*turning round to them*): You see? Always Martin. If I was responsible for all that, then it's your fault really, Gordon. Because you're responsible for everything that happened to me. You ought never to have married me.

GORDON: I didn't know. It was a mistake.

FREDA (*bitterly*): We seem to make that kind of mistake in our family.

BETTY (*moving down to end of piano*): I ought to have left you long before this. That was *my* mistake—staying on—trying to make the best of it—pretending to be married to somebody who wasn't there, simply dead.

GORDON: Yes, I think I am dead. I think I died last summer. Olwen shot me.

OLWEN: Gordon, I think that's unfair and also rather stupid and affected.

GORDON (*quietly*): It may have sounded like that, but it wasn't. I meant it, Olwen.

ROBERT (*who has just had half a glass of whisky*): I began this, didn't I? Well, I'll finish it. I'll say something now. Betty, I worshipped you, I suppose you knew that?

FREDA: If she didn't, she must have been very dense.

ROBERT (*turning on FREDA. He is not drunk but speaks in a thick voice and is a trifle wild in manner*): I'm talking to Betty now. You might leave us alone for a minute. (*Turning to BETTY.*) Did you realise that I felt like that, Betty?

BETTY: Yes. But I didn't care very much.

ROBERT (*bitterly*): No, why should you?

BETTY: No, it isn't that. But I knew you weren't in love with me. You didn't know me. You were only worshipping somebody you'd invented, who looked like me. And that's not the same thing at all.

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ROBERT: I didn't do much about it. I couldn't, you see. I thought that you and Gordon were reasonably happy together——

BETTY: Yes, we put up a good show, didn't we?

ROBERT: You did. (*Goes for another drink.*)

GORDON: Yes, we did. What would have happened if we'd gone on pretending like hell to be happy together?

BETTY: Nothing.

GORDON (*thinking it out*): No. If we'd gone on pretending long enough, I believe we might have *been* happy together, sometimes. It often works out like that.

BETTY: Never.

OLWEN: Yes, it does. That's why all this is so wrong really. The *real* truth is something so deep you can't get at it this way, and all this half truth does is to blow everything up. It isn't *civilised*.

STANTON: I agree.

ROBERT (*after another drink, cynically*): You agree!

STANTON: You'll get no sympathy from me, Caplan.

ROBERT: Sympathy from you! I never want to set eyes on you again, Stanton. You're a thief, a cheat, a liar, and a dirty cheap seducer.

STANTON: And you're a fool, Caplan. You look solid, but you're not. You've a good deal in common with that cracked brother of yours. You won't face up to real things. You've been living in a fool's paradise, and now, having got yourself out of it by to-night's efforts—all your doing—you're busy building yourself a fool's hell to live in.

ROBERT (*picking up the glass that STANTON had left*): I think this was your glass, Stanton. (*Moves up to window and throws it out.*) And now take yourself after it. Get out. (*Pours out another drink for himself.*)

STANTON: Good night, Olwen. I'm sorry about all this.

OLWEN: So am I. (*Offers him her hand. He takes it.*) Good night.

STANTON: Good night, Freda.

FREDA: Good night.

STANTON (*turning at door. To BETTY and GORDON*): I suppose you're coming along?

GORDON: Not with you, I'm afraid. And don't forget, Stanton, you owe the firm five hundred pounds—and a resignation.

STANTON: Oh, you're going to take it that way, are you?

GORDON: Yes, I'm going to take it that way.

STANTON: You'll regret it. Good night. (*With ironical politeness.*) No, don't trouble. I can find my way out. (*He goes out.*)

OLWEN: Don't be too hasty, Gordon. Whatever his faults Stanton's a first-class man at his job. If he goes, the firm will suffer.

GORDON: I can't help it. I couldn't work with him after this. The firm will have to suffer, that's all.

ROBERT: Don't worry. It's not a case of the firm suffering. The firm's smashed to hell *now*.

FREDA: Nonsense.

ROBERT: Is it? I don't think so.

GORDON (*bitterly*): Well, Betty darling, I think we'd better return to our happy little home, our dear little nest—

BETTY: Oh, don't, Gordon.

FREDA (*going out with GORDON*): I'll let you out.

ROBERT (*as BETTY turns to move off*): Good-bye. (*Staring at her.*)

BETTY: Why do you look like that?

ROBERT: I'm not saying good-bye to *you*. I don't know you. I never did, it seems. I'm saying good-bye to this. (*Indicates her face and body.*) That's all. (*Turns away abruptly, and goes up for another drink.*)

BETTY *stares for a second and then goes quickly out.*

OLWEN (*distressed*): Robert, please don't drink any more to-night. I know how you feel, but it'll only make you worse—really it will.

ROBERT: What does it matter? I'm through, anyway.

OLWEN: Robert, I can't bear seeing you like this. You don't know how it hurts me.

ROBERT: I'm sorry, Olwen, I really am sorry. You're the only one who's really come out of this. I know that. Strange, isn't it—that you should have been feeling like that about me all the time?

OLWEN: Yes, all the time.

ROBERT: I'm sorry.

OLWEN: I'm not. I mean about myself. I suppose I ought to be, but I'm not. It's hurt like anything sometimes, but it's kept me going too.

ROBERT: I know. And you see, now I've stopped going. Something's broken—inside.

OLWEN: It won't seem bad to-morrow. It never does.

ROBERT: All this isn't going to seem any better to-morrow, Olwen.

OLWEN: Freda will help too. After all, Robert, she's fond of you.

ROBERT: No, not really. It isn't that she dislikes me steadily, but every now and then she hates me—and now I see why, of course. She

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hates me because I'm Robert Caplan and not Martin, because he's dead and I'm alive.

OLWEN: She may feel differently—after to-night.

ROBERT: She may. I doubt it. She doesn't change easily—that's the trouble. And then again, you see, I don't care any more. That's the point. Whether she changes or doesn't change I don't care now.

OLWEN (*with deep feeling*): And you know there's nothing I wouldn't do, Robert. I'll— (*She gives a little laugh.*) I'll run away this very minute with you if you like.

ROBERT (*simply*): I'm terribly grateful, Olwen. But nothing happens here—inside. That's the damned awful cruel thing. Nothing happens. All hollow, empty.

FREDA *enters and shuts the door.*

FREDA: I'm sure it's not at all the proper thing to say at such a moment, but the fact remains that I feel rather hungry. What about you, Olwen? You, Robert? Or have you been drinking too much?

ROBERT: Yes, I've been drinking too much.

FREDA: Well, it's very silly of you.

ROBERT (*wearily*): Yes. (*Buries his face in his hands.*)

FREDA: And you did ask for all this.

ROBERT (*half looking up*): I asked for it. And I got it.

FREDA: Though I doubt if you minded very much until it came to Betty.

ROBERT: That's not true. But I can understand your thinking so. You see, as more and more of this rotten stuff came out, so more and more I came to depend on my secret thoughts of Betty—as someone who seemed to me to represent some lovely quality of life.

FREDA: I've known some time, of course, that you were getting very sentimental and noble about her. And I've known some time, too, all about Betty, and I've often thought of telling you.

ROBERT: I'm not sorry you didn't.

FREDA: You ought to be.

ROBERT: Why?

FREDA: That kind of self-deception's rather stupid.

ROBERT: What about you and Martin?

FREDA: I didn't deceive myself. I knew everything—or nearly everything—about him. I wasn't in love with somebody who really wasn't there, somebody I'd made up.

ROBERT: I think you were. Probably we always are.

OLWEN: Then it's not so bad. You can always build up another image for yourself to fall in love with.

ROBERT: No, you can't. That's the trouble. You lose the capacity for building. You run short of the stuff that creates beautiful illusions, just as if a gland had stopped working.

OLWEN: Then you have to learn to live without illusions.

ROBERT: Can't be done. Not for us. We started life too early for that. Possibly they're breeding people now who can live without illusions. I hope so. But I can't do it. I've lived among illusions——

FREDA (*grimly*): You have.

ROBERT (*with growing excitement*): Well, what if I have? They've given me hope and courage. They've helped me to live. I suppose we ought to get all that from faith in life. But I haven't got any. No religion or anything. Just this damned farmyard to live in. That's all. And just a few bloody glands and secretions and nerves to do it with. But it didn't look too bad. I'd my little illusions, you see.

FREDA (*bitterly*): Then why didn't you leave them alone, instead of clamouring for the truth all night like a fool?

ROBERT (*terribly excited now*): Because I *am* a fool. Stanton was right. That's the only answer. I had to meddle, like a child with a fire. I began this evening with something to keep me going. I'd good memories of Martin. I'd a wife who didn't love me, but at least seemed too good for me. I'd two partners I liked and respected. There was a girl I could idealise. And now——

OLWEN (*distressed*): No, Robert—please. We know.

ROBERT (*in a frenzy*): But you don't know, you *can't* know—not as I know—or you wouldn't stand there like that, as if we'd only just had some damned silly little squabble about a hand at bridge.

OLWEN: Freda, can't you——

ROBERT: Don't you see, we're not living in the same *world* now. Everything's gone. My brother was an obscene lunatic——

FREDA (*very sharply*): Stop that!

ROBERT: And my wife doted on him and pestered him. One of my partners is a liar and a cheat and a thief. The other—God knows what he is—some sort of hysterical young pervert—— (*Both women try to check and calm him.*) And the girl's a greedy little cat on the tiles——

OLWEN (*half screaming*): No, Robert, no. This is horrible, mad. Please, please don't go on. (*Quieter.*) It won't seem like this to-morrow.

ROBERT (*crazy now*): To-morrow. To-morrow. I tell you, I'm

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through. I'm through. There can't be a to-morrow. (*He goes swaying to the door.*)

FREDA (*screaming, moves to OLWEN and grips her arm*): He's got a revolver in his bedroom.

OLWEN (*screaming and running to the door*): Stop, Robert! Stop! Stop!

For the last few seconds the light has been fading, now it is completely dark. There is a revolver shot, a woman's scream, a moment's silence, then the sound of a woman sobbing, exactly as at the beginning of ACT I.

OLWEN (*in the darkness, with great emphasis but with a certain hysterical quality*): It can't happen. It shan't happen.

And now MISS MOCKRIDGE'S voice can be heard faintly, and the lights come up slowly, showing the four women in just the same places as they were at the beginning of ACT I.

MISS MOCKRIDGE: How many scenes did we miss?

OLWEN: Five, I think.

FREDA *goes to wireless and switches it off.*

MISS M.: I suppose they must have been telling a lot of lies in those scenes. That's why that man was so angry—the husband, I mean.

There is a subdued burst of laughter from the men in the dining-room.

BETTY: Listen to the men.

MISS M.: They're probably laughing at something very improper.

BETTY: No, just gossip. Men gossip like anything.

FREDA: Of course they do. And they've got a marvellous excuse now that they're all three directors of the firm.

MISS M.: What a snug little group you are.

FREDA (*making a face*): Snug little group. It sounds disgusting.

OLWEN: Enchanting. I hate to leave it.

MISS M.: I should think you do. It must be so comforting to be all so settled.

BETTY: Pretty good.

MISS M. (*to FREDA*): But I suppose you all miss your brother-in-law. He used to be down here with you too, didn't he?

FREDA: You mean Robert's brother, Martin.

OLWEN, BETTY and FREDA *exchange glances, and there is a pause.*

MISS M.: I say, have I dropped a brick? I always am dropping bricks.

FREDA (*very quietly*): No, not at all. It was very distressing at the time, but it's all right now. Martin shot himself.

MISS M.: Oh, yes—dreadful business, of course. He was very handsome, wasn't he?

Enter STANTON, followed by GORDON, who goes to front of settee and takes BETTY's hand.

OLWEN: Yes, very handsome.

STANTON (*with jovial condescension*): Who's very handsome? May we know?

BETTY: Not you, Charles.

GORDON: They were talking about me. Betty, why do you allow them to talk about your husband in this fulsome fashion. Have you no shame, girl?

BETTY (*taking his hand*): Darling, I'm sure you've had too much manly gossip and old brandy.

ROBERT *enters*.

ROBERT: Sorry to be so late, Freda—but it's that wretched puppy of yours.

FREDA: Oh, what's he been doing now?

ROBERT: He was trying to eat the script of Sonia William's new novel. I was afraid it might make him sick. You see, Miss Mockridge, how we talk of you novelists.

MISS M.: Yes, I hear you. I've just been saying what a charming, cosy little group you've made here. I think you've been lucky.

STANTON: It's not all luck, Miss Mockridge. You see, we all happen to be nice easy-going people.

ROBERT: Except Betty, she's terribly wild.

STANTON: That's only because Gordon doesn't beat her often enough—yet.

MISS M.: You see, Miss Peel, Mr. Stanton is still the cynical bachelor, I'm afraid he rather spoils the picture.

GORDON: What's disturbing the ether to-night? Anybody know? (*Beginning to fiddle with the wireless set.*)

FREDA: Oh, Gordon, don't start it again. We've only just turned it off.

GORDON: What did you hear?

FREDA: The last half of a play.

OLWEN: It was called "The Sleeping Dog."

STANTON: Why?

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MISS M.: We're not sure, but it ends with a gentleman shooting himself.

STANTON: What fun they have at B.B.C.

FREDA: Yes. Shots and things.

OLWEN: I think I understand that play now. The sleeping dog was the truth, do you see, and that man, the husband, insisted upon disturbing it.

ROBERT: He was quite right to disturb it.

STANTON: Was he? I wonder. I think telling the truth is about as healthy as skidding at sixty round a corner.

FREDA: And life's got lots of dangerous corners, hasn't it, Charles?

STANTON: It can have if you don't choose your route well.

FREDA (*nonchalantly*): Let's talk about something else. Who wants a drink? Drinks, Robert, and cigarettes.

ROBERT (*examining box on table*): There aren't any here.

FREDA: There are some in this one. (*Coming forward with musical cigarette box.*) Miss Mockridge, Olwen, a cigarette? (*Offers box to them.*)

OLWEN (*looking at the box*): Oh, I remember that box. It plays a tune at you, doesn't it? I remember the tune. Yes, it's the Wedding March. (*Opens box, and it plays.*)

GORDON (*who has been fiddling with the wireless*): Wait a minute. Listen to this.

"Can't we talk it over" gradually fades in on the wireless set.

BETTY (*rising*): Oh, I adore that tune.

STANTON: What is it?

BETTY: "Can't we talk it over".

MISS M.: What?

GORDON: "Can't we talk it over".

On this ROBERT pulls back the chair that MISS M. has been sitting in. FREDA moves the table back to window.

STANTON asks MISS M. to dance. She declines.

OLWEN crosses to ROBERT and they dance.

They are all very gay and the music gets louder and louder as the curtain falls.

END OF ACT THREE

EDEN END

A Play in Three Acts

TO
MY WIFE

CHARACTERS
(in order of appearance)

WILFRED KIRBY
SARAH
LILIAN KIRBY
DR. KIRBY
STELLA KIRBY
GEOFFREY FARRANT
CHARLES APPLEBY

ACT I
Tuesday Afternoon

ACT II
Friday Afternoon

ACT III
SCENE I. Saturday Night
SCENE II. Sunday Afternoon

The action takes place in the sitting-room of Dr. Kirby's house at Eden End in the North of England, the last week in October, 1912.

Eden End—Copyright, 1935, by J. B. Priestley.

First produced at the Duchess Theatre, London, on September 13th, 1934, with the following cast:

WILFRED KIRBY	JOHN TEED
SARAH	NELLIE BOWMAN
LILIAN KIRBY	ALISON LEGGATT
DR. KIRBY	EDWARD IRWIN
STELLA KIRBY	BEATRIX LEHMANN
GEOFFREY FARRANT	FRANKLYN BELLAMY
CHARLES APPLEBY	RALPH RICHARDSON

Play produced by IRENE HENTSCHEL

ACT I

Sitting-room of Dr. Kirby's house, Eden End. An afternoon of early autumn in the year 1912. A comfortable, well-worn room furnished in the taste of an earlier period. A door at the back, preferably up a few steps, leading from the rest of the house. A door on the right leading to a small room, originally the nursery, now used by SARAH to sit in and to do small jobs. Unless otherwise stated, all characters enter and leave by the main door on the left. A window at left looking out upon a distant grey-green hill of the North-country type. A bookshelf on right wall. A telephone prominently placed in corner near door on left. Upstage on left a cottage piano and old piano stool. WILFRED is discovered at this piano, carefully picking out with one finger, and sometimes vamping an accompaniment with left hand, a waltz refrain from "Gipsy Love". He is wearing a tweed suit but a linen collar and dark tie. He is about twenty-four, and though sunburned and in possession of a small moustache, he looks young, unsophisticated, rather weak. After a few moments, during which he can improve a little and even attempt to sing the tune, SARAH enters through door on right, carrying some things she has presumably been ironing in her little room. SARAH is an old North-country nurse, now about seventy, a queer old creature, at once simple and shrewd, and very earthy. She still slaves for all the family, but her tone toward them is still indulgent, as if they were children.

WILFRED: I'm getting it, Sarah. I'm getting it.

SARAH: You've been at it long enough.

WILFRED: Now just listen. (*He plays again and she stops in the middle, half-way between doors to listen.*)

WILFRED (*wheeling round*). What do you think of that?

SARAH: It sounds like proper playing—a'most.

WILFRED: Not so much of the *almost*. What more do you want?

SARAH: Well, I'm not saying you're not doing very well with it. But you'll never shape at it like Miss Stella, never in all your born days you won't.

WILFRED: Do you know how many times you've said that?

SARAH: For playing and singing and suchlike——

WILFRED: She was wonderful. I know. Well, I'm wonderful too.

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SARAH: You're a right untidy lad.

WILFRED: I'm not a lad.

SARAH: Bother I've had wi' your clothes.

WILFRED: Did you do anything to my blue shirt?

SARAH: Ay, that's mended. And two more beside. And two of the doctor's.

WILFRED: When I'm in Africa, Sarah, black women wash my clothes.

SARAH: I remember seeing four black women once at Martinbro Fair. Black as your boots they were. And fuzzy hair.

WILFRED: Where I work, when I go away, there are thousands and thousands of people like that. And I'm the boss. And then when I come home on leave, you call me a lad.

SARAH: These women kept rubbing their teeth with bits of stick, I remember. And I fancy it was the same year you went and fell into that duck pond just outside Martinbro. You wor only a little lad and you had your best sailor suit on. *(Goes to door on left.)*

WILFRED: What would you do if you saw a hippopotarnus?

SARAH: I don't know what they are. I've no time to be bothering wi' them things now.

WILFRED: Good old Sarah!

SARAH: You get on wi' your piano playing, and frame a bit better. *(Goes out.)*

WILFRED begins playing again, then leaves off, as if in disgust with himself. But hearing somebody coming through the door on left, he hastily plunges into a very noisy, inaccurate rendering of the waltz. LILIAN enters. She is a year or two older than her brother; neither pretty nor ugly; neatly but not well dressed in indoor clothes. She has more sweetness of character than would superficially appear from what she says and does. When she is not taking refuge in sarcasm, she is quick and eager. She goes over to the bookcase and takes a book that is lying open on the top.

LILIAN: What's that awful row?

WILFRED: That's the waltz from "Gipsy Love".

LILIAN: It sounds a mess.

WILFRED: That's because I can't play it properly.

LILIAN: That's obvious.

WILFRED: You ought to hear it as they do it. Gertie Millar and Robert Michaelis.

LILIAN *(ironically)*: Wonderful!

WILFRED (*ignoring this, eagerly*): You know—somehow—it completely carried me away. It's rot, I suppose—

LILIAN (*now trying to read*): Of course it's rot.

WILFRED: Yes, but just think. (*Breaks off*.) You *might* listen, Lilian. Hang it all, I'm not always here to tell you things. And I listen to you.

LILIAN (*looking up from book*): Go on then.

WILFRED (*warming as he goes on*): Just think of it. Back from Africa. London. First night on leave. A jolly good dinner with two other chaps from the Company. Then Daly's. Lights, and everybody in the stalls dressed, stunning girls, the band playing—and then Gertie Millar—and—oh—everything. Do you know, Lilian, I felt quite queer. I nearly cried.

LILIAN: Did you?

WILFRED: I didn't really cry, you know. But I nearly did. Felt like it.

LILIAN: That's the only bit you haven't told me twenty times already.

WILFRED (*hotly*): That's not true.

LILIAN: Sorry, but it is. I can tell you the names of the chaps—as you call them—who went with you that night. One was called Patterson, and he comes from Cumberland and he's a good footballer. The other's called Bell—Bell—Bellingham—

WILFRED (*gloomily*): Bellington.

LILIAN: That's it. Not much difference. He's called Bellington and he comes from Devonshire, and he's got a sister who's married to a Captain in the Navy. There!

WILFRED (*getting up, huffily*): Sorry. Didn't know I'd been boring you.

LILIAN (*beginning to read*): You haven't. Don't apologise. (*She looks at him as he stands looking out of the window.*) By the way, you wouldn't like to walk into the village to give an order to Gregson's, would you?

WILFRED: No thanks.

LILIAN: Then I suppose I'll have to go. Soon. (*Begins reading again.*)

WILFRED (*turning to look at her*): Don't you ever get tired of reading?

LILIAN (*without looking up*): Yes.

WILFRED: You're always reading.

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LILIAN (*without looking up*): I'm not. I spend most of the day looking after this house, and Dad, and you when you're at home.

WILFRED: Yes, but the minute you've done you begin reading. What's that?

LILIAN: Wells's new book. *Marriage*. (*Goes on reading.*)

WILFRED: You never seem to stop reading H. G. Wells. I don't know how you can stick him. I can't. He always makes me feel so uncomfortable. Doesn't seem to *like* anything. What's the point of reading if it makes you feel uncomfortable? It's bad enough in real life.

LILIAN (*still reading*): That's stupid.

WILFRED: Why is it stupid? (*She gives no reply but goes on reading.*) Geoffrey Farrant was saying just the same thing the other day. (*She looks up. He guffaws.*) I knew that would make you look up.

LILIAN (*crossly*): Don't be absurd. (*Hesitates.*) Did Geoffrey really say that?

WILFRED (*teasing*): Wouldn't you like to know?

LILIAN: It doesn't matter in the least.

WILFRED: Is Geoffrey coming round to-night?

LILIAN: I don't know. He might.

WILFRED (*wandering about, after lighting a cigarette*): Good old Geoffrey! By jove, when I was a kid, about fourteen, I used to think he was marvellous. That was when he was mad on Stella. He was my hero all right; regular soldier, captain, wounded in the Boer War—I used to follow him round like a little dog. I must have been a nuisance when he wanted to be alone with Stella. She used to tease him and say he came round just to be a hero to me. That's a long time ago. Nearly ten years. I say.

LILIAN (*rather wearily*): Well?

WILFRED: You see a lot of Geoffrey these days. Does he ever talk about Stella?

LILIAN (*shortly*): No, why should he? Give me a cigarette.

WILFRED: What for? You don't smoke.

LILIAN: I do if I want to. Give me one, please. (*Holds out hand.*)

WILFRED: Oh, all right, Christabel Pankhurst. (*Giving her one.*) But mind you don't make yourself sick.

LILIAN: Why should I? I'm better at not being sick than you are. You admit yourself you're always seasick.

WILFRED: That's different. Besides, just you try going through the Bay of Biscay in winter—as I've done, three times now.

LILIAN: And then there was the time when we both went on the swings at Martinbro Fair, and you were horribly sick and I wasn't. *(She awkwardly lights cigarette, and then, when it gets going, takes too deep a breath and coughs.)*

WILFRED: You see. Take it easy. What if Dad marches in?

LILIAN: He won't mind. Mother would have minded, but Dad won't. *(She does not make a success of her smoking.)*

WILFRED: One of our chaps in Nigeria told me his father wouldn't let him do *anything*. Terribly strict. That's why he cleared out.

LILIAN: Lucky chap.

WILFRED *(wandering over to the telephone)*: You know, when I came home and saw the telephone, brand new, I thought I'd be able to have a lot of fun with it, but I haven't. There's nobody to ring up here in Eden End.

LILIAN: Who were you ringing up yesterday?

WILFRED *(indignantly)*: You were listening!

LILIAN: I wasn't. I happened to hear your voice when I was in the hall, putting some things away. Who was it?

WILFRED: Oh—just somebody I know.

LILIAN: A girl, obviously. You're keeping her very dark, aren't you?

WILFRED: I don't know her very well, and, anyhow, she lives miles away, the other side of Martinbro. Never mind about her.

LILIAN: I'm not minding. But I suspect she's a barmaid and that's why you can get her on the telephone.

WILFRED: You know, Lilian, one thing puzzles me.

LILIAN: And if she's a barmaid, on the telephone, and the other side of Martinbro, she's probably at that big pub at the crossroads near Denly Dene—the "White Hart".

WILFRED *(angrily)*: Will you listen?

LILIAN: Do you really like her, Wilfred? Or do you just think that being sweet on a barmaid is very manly and West African?

WILFRED: I'm trying to say something important.

LILIAN: Well, what is it?

WILFRED: You don't really want to know. You'll only laugh.

LILIAN: You've got to risk that. I mightn't. Tell me.

WILFRED *(hesitating)*: It's difficult to explain. But I feel as if I'm being done in the eye.

LILIAN: You probably are.

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WILFRED: You see, when I'm out there, in Africa, I think of Eden End here—home and you and Dad, and everything, and I long for leave, and when at last it comes—well, of course, it's ripping. But then when I've been here a week or two——

LILIAN: It all begins to look dull. Doesn't it?

WILFRED: Well, not quite as bad as that.

LILIAN: Yes it is. Don't sound so apologetic. I don't blame you.

WILFRED: Anyhow it isn't what I expected. And then I begin to think about Nigeria, and I begin to feel it won't be bad getting back there. But now I know that once I *am* back there I'll be longing to be on leave again, and this place will seem all different. I've got into a sort of life where I'm never in the right place at the right time.

LILIAN: Poor Wilfred. You were just like that when you were at school.

WILFRED: I know. And I thought it would be different when I left school and grew up. Perhaps it will, later on.

LILIAN: Perhaps it will. You've plenty of time.

WILFRED: Things can't stay like this. When I've more money I shall have more fun on leave. And it'll be more amusing out there when I'm promoted. It's Nineteen Twelve now. In three or four years time—say in Nineteen Sixteen, I may have a district of my own.

LILIAN: Could I come out and see you then?

WILFRED: You might. Depends where I'm sent.

LILIAN: You may be married before then.

WILFRED: I don't suppose so. Three or four years isn't really a long time. Hurry up, Nineteen Sixteen. Sounds a nice ripe sort of year, doesn't it?—Nineteen Sixteen.

From the door on left come three deliberate knocks. The two look at it sharply, rather startled—though they must avoid any nervous jump. WILFRED goes to the door and opens it. SARAH enters, carrying a large basket heaped with old clothes.

SARAH (*breathlessly*): I didn't want to put this down to open the door because I'm not so good at stooping as I was—gives me palpitations—and I've been stooping enough.

LILIAN: What have you been doing?

SARAH: I've been up in the back garret, samming up these old clothes for the doctor. He wants to give 'em away. (*She comes forward as she says this and rests the basket on the table.*) Eh, and look what I found. (*Holds out an old fancy costume.*)

LILIAN: What is it?

SARAH: Don't you remember? It's very same dress Miss Stella wore that time she acted in the Town Hall at Martinbro, and they all clapped her so long, and she came back and told her poor mother she was going on the stage for a living, and we had such a do—all shouting and bawling and crying. Don't you remember it?

WILFRED: I do.

LILIAN: Yes, I do now.

SARAH: And I should think so. I helped her to make it, and right bonny she looked in it. But she never took it with her when she went, and it's been behind some boxes in the back garret. I fancy your mother threw it there. Moths has been at it a bit, but I'm thinking it'd clean and mend.

LILIAN: What for? It's quite useless.

SARAH: How do you know? We might send it to her and she might be glad of it for her acting.

WILFRED (*laughing*): You're cracked, Sarah.

SARAH (*indignant*): What's there to laugh at, I'd like to know?

LILIAN: Nothing. Only, you sec, we couldn't send it to Stella—even if it would be useful—because we don't know where she is.

SARAH: Isn't she out—you know—where's it? That big place?

WILFRED: Timbuctoo.

SARAH: Not Timbuctoo neither, you daft lad. It's where she said there was all eucalyptus.

LILIAN: It was Australia. But that was three years ago, and we haven't heard anything from her since.

SARAH: Is it three years since we heard last?

LILIAN: Yes. And she's been away more than eight years.

SARAH (*her face working as she fingers the costume*): I didn't think it was so long. I'm getting old and I forget. I'm dreaming half my time.

LILIAN (*looking at the costume*): I remember. It was pretty. I believe I was jealous because I hadn't one like it.

SARAH: Yes, you wor. You wor a jealous little madam in them days, let me tell you. Sec. I sewed them on myself for her. It was all a secret. She used to sneak in there (*pointing to door on right*) to try it on. It only seems yesterday. I mun sort these out.

WILFRED: Here, I'll take them.

Picks up basket, etc., and takes them into room on right. SARAH moves towards door, after him, carrying the costume.

SARAH (*turning*): Your father's in. He called at Gregson's. (*The*

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telephone bell rings. She looks at it mistrustfully.) That wants answering now. Daft thing. Got to wait on a machine, that's what we're coming to. It'll never get me waiting on it, and it can ring its head off.

She goes into room on right. LILIAN goes to the telephone, but DR. KIRBY enters quickly and forestalls her. He is a pleasant homely man about sixty, wearing an old house coat over a dark professional suit. He attends to the telephone rather pompously and proudly.

DR. KIRBY (*at telephone*): Hello, yes. Yes, Dr. Kirby here. Oh—is that you, William? . . . She's what? . . . Oh I see . . . Well, what do you expect? . . . No pains? . . . I see . . . Yes, keep her warm. And don't worry. Nothing new. It's all happened before. . . . That's right, let me know. And, William, just keep out of the Eden Moor Hotel for a night or two, will you? . . . That's it. You're not in the right state of mind to do yourself any good in the bar of the Eden Moor . . . (*chuckles*). All right. Don't worry. (*Puts down receiver and begins lighting his pipe.*) William Sugden worrying about his wife. She'll be all right. Stronger than he is. Now it just shows you, Lilian, how useful a telephone is here. That little chat across the wires has saved William or me a useless journey. Pity we hadn't it here years ago. We're too old-fashioned round here. Out of date.

LILIAN: You don't think you're out of date, do you?

DR. KIRBY: Me? Years out of date. I've just been trying to understand what some of these young fellows are writing now in the medical journals. Too clever for me. Too Nineteen Twelve altogether. But I could probably give 'em points when it comes to dealing with William Sugden and his wife. (*As WILFRED enters from room on right.*) Hello, Wilfred, what have you been doing in there?

WILFRED: Helping Sarah to sort out some old clothes for you.

DR. KIRBY: Good. They can do with some of them down in the village. Lloyd George is going to give 'em ninepence for fourpence soon, with me thrown in, but in the meantime we'll give them some old clothes to be going on with.

WILFRED: Would you like to hear my gramophone, Dad?

DR. KIRBY: No, thank you. I've got to get back to the surgery. But if I was staying I'd just as soon not hear your gramophone. I've got to listen to too many patients to want to hear mechanical music—if it is music. By the way, old Burton tells me they had a fire in the post office at Martinbro late last night. He said they think it's suffragettes. Lot of nonsense. They've got suffragettes on the brain, some of 'em. (*Goes to door on left.*)

WILFRED: Well, it might be, Dad.

DR. KIRBY (*turning at door*): What, at Martinbro! What would they be doing there? Looking for Mr. Asquith! All nonsense. And talking about nonsense, I forgot to tell you I've just been invited to dine at Grosvenor House with the Duke of Westminster.

LILIAN and WILFRED (*together*): Dad, you haven't?

DR. KIRBY: I have. And so has everybody else. The only condition is that we each pay a thousand pounds to Chamberlain's birthday fund for Tariff Reform. I'm not accepting. (*He goes out and LILIAN settles down to read again.*)

WILFRED (*restlessly*): We ought to have a billiard table here. If I got more chance to play, I believe I should be good at billiards. I made a break of twenty-seven when I played at the club at Akassa.

LILIAN (*staring at him, quietly*): Isn't it ridiculous that you should go to all these places while I have to stay here?

WILFRED: No, I don't see that.

LILIAN: But I used to be much more adventurous than you, and much keener on exploring and wild places. I'll bet I've read far more about Africa than you have.

WILFRED: What's that? Reading about it! I've been.

LILIAN: I believe I'd rather have gone with Captain Scott to the South Pole than done anything in the world. And if he lectures about it when he comes back I shall go, I don't care where it is.

WILFRED: Well, you can't be so jolly adventurous—as you call it—else you'd have cleared out. After all, Stella did.

LILIAN (*rather bitterly*): Yes, Stella did. And what happened then? Mother died. Father was left, miserable, with nobody to look after him. As soon as I'd done with school I'd obviously got to come back here and look after things. It's easy enough to do what Stella did—just to clear out and do what you want to do.

WILFRED: Yes, but she knew what she wanted to do.

LILIAN: Perhaps I did, too.

WILFRED: You know, that night I went to Daly's, I thought how queer it would be if I suddenly saw Stella come on the stage.

LILIAN (*with slight sardonic emphasis*): Very queer.

WILFRED: I always look at advertisements and programmes and bills to see if she's on. It's silly having a sister on the stage if you've never *seen* her on the stage. Wouldn't it be grand if she became a star—like Gertie Millar or Phyllis Dare?

LILIAN (*sardonically*): Yes. And if the British West African Company suddenly appointed you managing director. And if the King fell ill and they all said, "Send for Dr. Kirby of Eden End." And if

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Pierpoint Morgan or Rockefeller said "I must give Lilian Kirby a million pounds, she's been such a good girl."

WILFRED (*guffawing*): And if old Sarah won a prize for doing the Turkey Trot. And if Geoffrey Farrant—what do we do for Geoffrey?

LILIAN: Something with horses or dogs in it.

WILFRED: We'll let him win next year's Derby then. You're not very keen on horses and dogs, are you?

LILIAN (*coldly*): What's that got to do with it?

WILFRED (*grinning*): Nothing.

LILIAN: Don't be an oaf.

WILFRED: One of our chaps in Benin used to own two race-horses when he was in England. Awful nut. What about a good old row on the gramophone?

LILIAN: Must you?

WILFRED (*going over to gramophone*): Yes, I must. I shall take this back with me. (*Putting on record.*) You know, these things are getting awfully good.

Plays a tune. If lighting is changed, this is the time to change it. While the record is being played, WILFRED can light one lamp and LILIAN another. Before record is quite finished LILIAN, who is nearer door on left, must listen and hold up her hand. WILFRED takes off the record. They hear a voice coming through the door. The voice, STELLA'S, must be audible everywhere, but it does not matter if actual words are not caught. Actually she is saying "Yes, put it down there, please. What do I pay you? There you are. Thank you." STELLA is five or six years older than LILIAN, and looks her age, but is extremely attractive. She is dressed as an actress, hoping to be smart, would be dressed at that time, but her clothes must not be really good or very new, so that it is obvious to an acute feminine spectator that she is not really flourishing. She plays at once in a higher key than the rest of the family, and is obviously an actress as well as a prodigal daughter. All her emotions are quite sincere, but she cannot help being a little larger than life. This gradually wears off during her stay until the scene of her departure, when there are glimpses of the actress again.

WILFRED: Stella!

STELLA: Oh it's Wilfred. All grown up. And a moustache. (*Embraces and kisses him. Then looks at LILIAN.*) And Lilian. All grown up, too. Here, let me take this damned hat off. (*Hastily takes it off and flings it aside, then rushes over to LILIAN and embraces and kisses her.*) Lilian darling, you're not at all what I expected you to look like, and

yet you're completely Lilian and just right. Isn't it odd? (*Looking round.*) And everything just the same. Only smaller.

SARAH *comes in and stands just inside, from door on right, staring at STELLA with puckered face.*

STELLA (*seeing her, and rushing over*): Why, Sarah. My precious, precious lovely old Sarah! (*Kisses her.*)

SARAH (*in tears*): Nay—I can't talk.

STELLA (*laughing and crying*): And I can't.

SARAH (*making an effort*): Eh—you haven't altered a bit, love.

STELLA: Oh, but I have. I'm old, Sarah—yes, old. I'll never see thirty again. My hair's turning grey.

SARAH: It isn't.

STELLA: Some of it is. I pulled three grey hairs out yesterday. Where's Dad? Is he—all right?

LILIAN: Yes. He's in the surgery.

WILFRED: Shall I tell him?

STELLA: No, don't disturb him. We'll give him a surprise. Is he just the same?

WILFRED: Of course.

STELLA: *Of course?* There isn't any *of course* about it. Oh Wilfred—that just shows how young you are, in spite of that moustache. People change. Everything changes. Does he still watch birds and collect eighteenth-century engravings?

LILIAN: Yes. Dad hasn't changed at all.

STELLA: Thank God!

LILIAN: But why didn't you tell us you were coming?

STELLA: Oh—my dear—I couldn't. I didn't know. And I couldn't just write. I think I was afraid to. Either I had to stay away or come just like this, with a rush. Don't you understand?

LILIAN: Yes. You'd been away so long.

STELLA: So long. And to so many places.

WILFRED: Where have you been, Stella?

STELLA: Where haven't I been? All over England. Then out East. Then Australia—I wrote to you from there——

SARAH: Yes, you did, love.

STELLA: I was nearly dying of homesickness when I wrote that letter. You can't imagine what it's like.

WILFRED (*proudly*): I can. I'm in Nigeria now. Got a job with the British West African Development Company. I'm on leave.

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STELLA (*smiling at him*): Africa and on leave. Wilfred, it's incredible. It seems only yesterday since you were a fat little schoolboy. I'm sorry but it does. I didn't really believe in that moustache. Somehow I thought of you just sticking it on for fun.

WILFRED: I'm twenty-four. I've been four years with the British West African.

STELLA: Isn't that wonderful? And then after Australia, I went to America. We travelled thousands of miles. I seem to have lived in railway trains—with cinders in my eye and a headache—for centuries. None of it real. Like a long stupid dream. And now I'm home. You don't know what it means.

SARAH: Aren't you famished, love? Can't I get you something?

STELLA: No, thank you. Not just now, Sarah. (*She looks about her.*) It's just as I remembered it, only so much smaller. All the time I've been away, it's been shrinking and shrinking. Like life. Oh—(*darting over*)—there's the china castle. Still there. Not broken. All sorts of things can get broken—people can be broken—and yet a thing like this can go on and on. (*Holding it, looking at it.*) I remember how I used to wonder what was happening inside it. Tiny people all made of china.

WILFRED: You used to tell me stories about that castle.

STELLA: And look—the boy's still riding on his goat. What did we used to call him?

LILIAN: Llewellyn. Because he came from Wales.

STELLA: Yes. Dear, dear Llewellyn. His nice silly face has come popping up in dreams. I saw him distinctly once—oh, when was it?—on some long, awful train journey, hot and dusty. And there was Llewellyn riding his goat. (*Goes round touching things.*) And here's Coblenz. (*Looking at old colour print.*) The three soldiers talking. The man carrying the load. The woman with the red petticoat. And the two holding hands. Do you remember how we used to look at it for hours and wonder what was happening round the corner? But where's the other one, you know, Frankfort, with the river and the barges and the little fat woman?

WILFRED: Yes, where is Frankfort? I hadn't noticed it was gone.

SARAH: That's the picture that fell down, isn't it?

LILIAN: Yes, it was broken. About a year ago.

STELLA: Tell me about people. The Mowbrays and the Oldroyds and the Burtons—and everybody. Oh—and my old admirer, Geoffrey Farrant. What's happened to him?

LILIAN: He's still here. His father died.

STELLA: Is he married? Do you ever see him?

LILIAN: He's not married.

WILFRED: And we often see him. He's a great pal of Lilian's now.

LILIAN: Where are your things?

STELLA: My trunk? It's in the hall. I got a trap from the station, but I didn't know the man who brought me. I didn't recognise anybody at the station either. But Eden Moor and Eden End looked just the same. And, coming up, there was a lovely deep rich autumn smell—smoke and dead leaves and the moors all mixed up—and I was absolutely drowned in it and I didn't seem to have been away at all. Millions of smells, mostly beastly, that I've smelt these last eight or nine years were completely washed out. Nothing had really happened. I might have only been in to Martinbro for the day. You were still at school, Wilfred. You'd only just left, Lilian, and you'd still two long plaits. And Dad and Mother—— (*she breaks off, hesitates, then in a low voice.*) Was it awful, Lilian—about Mother?

LILIAN (*quietly*): Yes, for a time. But it's six years ago, you know. She wasn't ill very long, but she'd a lot of pain. It was Dad I was sorry for. (*STELLA begins to cry quietly.*)

SARAH (*going to her*): Miss Stella—love.

STELLA (*through her tears*): Such a silly thing happened in the train. A man sitting opposite me—he looked like Winston Churchill, only fatter—carefully unpacked a lot of sandwiches on the seat, stood up for something, and then suddenly sat down on the sandwiches. There was another woman in the carriage, and we suddenly laughed and laughed, and then the man laughed too. They were very eggy sandwiches. Why are some things so silly?

WILFRED: Do you remember the time when a little man with a very funny face—what was his name?—Flockton—he'd known Dad at college—and we started giggling and then had to go outside in turns to laugh?

STELLA: Yes, Mr. Flockton. And it was much worse for me because I was so much older and I had to be polite. And then the time when poor Aunt Mary brought that new bun flour?

WILFRED: Yes, and the time when the young man called Egg-something came to see you and dropped the tea tray?

LILIAN: And the time when we all went to the Mowbrays for a party on the wrong day?

STELLA: And the snow was so thick we had to stay and they were so cross, and we were so cross, and all the chimneys smoked. (*Laughs.*)

WILFRED (*laughing*): And I broke a huge ornament and put the pieces in the coal scuttle.

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STELLA: I was thinking about all those things coming up in the train. And I've got millions of questions to ask.

WILFRED: So have we, haven't we, Lilian?

LILIAN: I suppose you'd like your old room, wouldn't you?

STELLA: I'd love it if it's free.

LILIAN: It's full of odds and ends at the moment——

SARAH (*eagerly*): I'll get it ready, Miss Lilian.

LILIAN: No, I'll do it. Wilfred can give me a hand. There may be some furniture to move.

WILFRED: Rather!

STELLA: Can't I do anything?

LILIAN: No. You're tired. Besides you don't know where things are now. And Dad will be in in a minute. You wait here. (*She goes out.*)

WILFRED: You know, Stella, when you were home I was only a kid and didn't bother about the theatre, but now I'm very keen. I saw "Gipsy Love" at Daly's a few weeks ago—and you've got to tell me all about it.

STELLA: All right. I'll tell you miles and miles of it.

SARAH *goes into room on right.*

WILFRED: Good. I expect you've done jolly well, haven't you? I was telling Lilian only this afternoon how I always looked out for your name, but never saw it.

STELLA: I've been out of England so much, you see.

WILFRED: Yes, that accounts for it. Well, you're looking an awful swell.

STELLA: I should have thought I was looking like nothing on earth.

WILFRED: I expect you've had a marvellous time, haven't you?

STELLA: Well—mixed, you know.

WILFRED: You'll find it pretty dull here.

STELLA: I shan't. (*Draws a long breath.*) It's heavenly. Even though you have been in Africa and come on leave you can't imagine what it means to me to be back again—home. It's real. Everything's real again.

SARAH *re-enters, carrying dress behind her back.*

WILFRED: I'm going to give Lilian a hand with your room. Then I'll come down and ask you thousands of questions. (*Hesitates.*) I say, you don't think this moustache looks silly, do you?

STELLA: Wilfred, it's a *grand* moustache, and you look a real

African adventurer with it. It's tremendously exciting to be a sister to such a moustache. In a year or two it's going to be a terrific heart-breaker.

WILFRED (*smiling*): You're pulling my leg. You always did, you know.

STELLA: Well, isn't it nice that I'm starting all over again?

WILFRED (*shyly*): Yes. (*Smiles.*) Good old Stella! (*Goes out.*)

STELLA *looks after him and smiles. Then she turns and sees*

SARAH.

STELLA: I think Wilfred's grown up to be a very nice young man. Don't you?

SARAH: Oh—Master Wilfred's all right. But he's only a bit of a lad, for all his big talk. Miss Lilian's different. She's properly grown up. Always was a bit old-fashioned. Never gave herself away. And there's times now when—dang me!—you'd think she wor fifty—to hear her talk. Not that she talks much.

STELLA: I don't suppose poor Lilian's had a very easy life all these years I've been away. She's a bit—quicer. Sort of sunk into herself. On her guard, somehow. Almost as if I were a stranger. Perhaps I am a stranger, Sarah. But I don't seem like one to myself—only Stella Kirby, back home again in Eden End.

SARAH: And look what I found—not an hour since—it might ha' been waiting for you to come home. Look. (*Holds out fancy costume.*)

STELLA: Why it's the one I wore, ages ago, in that show at the Town Hall at Martinbro. The one you and I made, Sarah.

SARAH: I know it is. I was going to clean and mend it. Moths has been at it.

STELLA: The moths have been at us all, Sarah darling. But I never thought I'd see this costume again. The excitement there was here about it! Do you remember?

SARAH: I should think I do.

STELLA: I thought I was a real actress the night I put this on.

SARAH: Well, they clapped you enough.

STELLA: More than some people have clapped me since. That was the night. Look at it. Pathetic!

SARAH: Why, I see nowt wrong wi' it, except where moths has been. It's a right bonny dress. I thowt so then and I think so now.

STELLA: So do I. It's a lovely dress. I must put it on. Oh, I've torn it! The belle and leading juvenile of the Martinbro Amateur Dramatic Society. And fat old Mr. Burton gave me a box of chocolates, do you remember?

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SARAH: Ay, and he'd have given a lot more besides chocolates if you'd let him, that chap would. I've heard tales of him since.

STELLA *poses and curtsies before SARAH.*

SARAH: Eh, I'm thankful to have seen this day, love. I've prayed to be spared to see you come home.

STELLA: I'm sorry I have been so long.

SARAH: You didn't forget me?

STELLA: Never, never, never. All over the world, in the oddest places, I've thought about you, longed to see you again. You needn't pray any more. I've come home. (*Kisses her.*)

SARAH (*looking hard at her*): You've always been a bonny piece. You wor a grand baby, and a fine little lass, and a bonny young woman when you grew up.

STELLA: Bless you for those kind words.

SARAH: But there's lines in that face that weren't there when I last saw it.

STELLA: I'm getting on. And all those years I was away haven't been easy.

SARAH: No, that's it. I can see as much. You've had your troubles, haven't you? (*When STELLA does not reply.*) Nay, you can tell me even if you never tell another soul. I'll say nowt.

STELLA: Yes. I've had my troubles.

SARAH: Disappointments?

STELLA: Yes. A fair share.

SARAH (*gently*): Didn't they treat you well on the stage, love?

STELLA: Nearly as well as I deserved, I suppose. But—and this is our secret, Sarah—I wasn't the great actress I thought I was going to be. I wasn't bad. I'm not bad. But somehow I've never been able to do what I thought I could do. Something gets in the way. I feel it all inside, but it doesn't come out right. I've disappointed myself. I think even mother would have been sorry for me if she'd known. I don't say I've had wonderful chances, but I have had chances. And somehow I've missed them. Perhaps I came nearer to being a really good actress the night I wore this pathetic thing than I've ever done since. It's all gone wrong, Sarah, my dear. My work, my life. Oh—(*tears off the dress*)—I'm a dismal failure. (*Breaking down.*)

SARAH: Don't worry, love, don't worry. There's plenty of time. You're young.

STELLA: No, I'm not.

SARAH: I think I hear the doctor.

STELLA (*springing up, alarmed*): Dad mustn't see me like this. (*Begins doing her face.*) And he mustn't know.

SARAH (*fussing over her*): He won't from me. Nobody will. I'll see if he's there.

She goes to door on left. STELLA hastily concludes her powdering and begins to look brighter. SARAH goes out, leaving the door open, and DR. KIRBY comes to the doorway and stands amazed.

DR. KIRBY: Is it Stella?

STELLA: Yes, Father. (*Then, with a little cry, she runs over to him, and he meets her at the bottom of the steps and they kiss and hug one another.*)

STELLA: You're just the same, Dad. Only a little greyer, that's all.

DR. KIRBY: No, I'm a lot older. And you're older too, you know. I'm not going to flatter you even if you are a famous actress. You look a bit tired. But then I expect you are after your journey. Where did you come from?

STELLA: London. I caught the eleven o'clock to Martinbro.

DR. KIRBY: Ah, yes—the good old eleven o'clock. Why didn't you let us know? We'd have had the fatted calf ready for you.

STELLA: I couldn't. I came—oh—it was a sudden impulse. I'm still impulsive, you know.

DR. KIRBY: We thought you'd forgotten us.

STELLA: I've never forgotten you for a single moment. How could I? But I've been out of England for years—touring, working hard. My plans always seemed so confused. It was difficult to write.

DR. KIRBY: Yes, I can understand that, though in a quiet corner like this we're apt to forget what the hustling and bustling world—*your world*—is like. You know, Stella, I've been thinking a lot just lately—(*his voice trails away.*)

STELLA (*after a pause*): Yes, Father?

DR. KIRBY: Something happened that made me start thinking. You might call it taking stock. Thinking about life—my life—your life. You know, I've come to the conclusion that you were right, and your mother and I were wrong.

STELLA (*hastily, painfully*): No, no——

DR. KIRBY: That's all right. It's all old history now. We can talk frankly and freely now. And you're a grown-up woman, not a bit of a girl. You were right to do what you did. I'm not saying that you didn't cause any pain——

STELLA: I did, I know.

DR. KIRBY: But that wasn't your fault. That's life. Life can't

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move on without inflicting pain. We can't come into this world without somebody being hurt. As well I know. I shall be lucky if I don't see a bit more of it late to-night. The great cosmic processes have a habit of reaching a climax round here just when I've got comfortably off to sleep.

STELLA: Poor Dad. Who is it this time?

DR. KIRBY: A Mrs. Sugden. I think she's since your time. Well, I think I've done my duty by her and her like in this neighbourhood for nearly forty years.

STELLA: I know you have. And I'm sure they still worship you.

DR. KIRBY: Not they. I only wish they'd pay a bit more attention and then pay a few more bills. But I'm not complaining. I've had a good life here. Your mother and I were happy. We'd all the friends we wanted. This has been a real home. Even to you, it was once.

STELLA (*softly*): Do you think I could forget it?

DR. KIRBY: And then, besides my work and my family, I'd my little hobbies—my birds. (*With sudden animation.*) And by the way, don't let anybody tell you that you can't see a needle-tailed swift in this country, because I saw one myself, only this last summer. A needle-tailed swift. No mistake about it.

STELLA (*affectionately, laughing*): Oh—Dad—I won't let anybody tell me. I'll put them in their place at once.

DR. KIRBY: That's right. There's as much clap-trap talked about birds now as there is about anything else. Why, only the other day—

STELLA (*laughing*): But Dad, you can't go on about birds now. You were just going to tell me something important, something serious.

DR. KIRBY (*with a twinkle*): Well, this is important.

STELLA: Yes, and I'd love to hear it, but that will do any time. Perhaps this other thing won't.

DR. KIRBY (*seriously*): That's true. This is something I wouldn't say to the younger children. What I was going to say was this. Looking back on my life, it's been a reasonably good one—

STELLA: And you wouldn't change it.

DR. KIRBY: That's where you're wrong. I would.

STELLA (*surprised*): Dad!

DR. KIRBY: There was a time when I had to make a choice.

STELLA: Between this—and another kind of life?

DR. KIRBY: Yes. I wasn't always a plodding old G.P., you know,

years behind the times. Once, I was thought to be a very clever young man. I had a brilliant career as a student. Then I had to make a choice, between settling down here, quietly and comfortably, or taking a risk in London. I might have failed there. On the other hand, I might have been successful. Men who walked the hospitals when I did, men who hadn't the reputation I had, have been very successful. Some of them—I could give you their names—have been knighted and so forth, are now rich and famous.

STELLA: Pooh!—what's that!

DR. KIRBY: Mere vulgar rewards, if you like.

STELLA: In Harley Street you'd never have seen a bird—except a dirty London sparrow.

DR. KIRBY: I'm not envying them, Stella. Nevertheless, they've had brilliant careers, done original work, met all the great personalities of their time, missed none of the prizes of life.

STELLA: How do you know? They've missed the larks on Eden Moor.

DR. KIRBY: The larks and the moors are there if they want them, and they've probably more leisure now to enjoy such things than I have. And, in addition, they've had all the rest. They've lived as I haven't lived, and as you—I'm glad to say—are living. You were right, Stella, to cut and run when you did. And now, looking back when it's all nearly ended—

STELLA (*sharply*): Don't talk like that, Father. You're not old yet.

DR. KIRBY (*firmly*): I say, looking back when it's all nearly ended, I wish now that I'd had the same sort of courage.

STELLA: It's not courage.

DR. KIRBY: I won't envy my—er—distinguished colleagues. But I can envy you, my dear. And I do. You made a bolt for the main road. You're doing what you always wanted to do, and you've made a success of it, gone all over the world, been applauded and admired everywhere, given pleasure to thousands and thousands—

STELLA (*jumping up, in distress*): Oh—Dad—please, please stop.

DR. KIRBY (*astonished*): What's the matter? I never knew actresses suffered from such modesty.

STELLA (*trying to take hold of herself*): It isn't that.

DR. KIRBY: What is it then?

STELLA: Oh—I don't know. Perhaps it's hearing *you* say these things.

DR. KIRBY: Don't try to be kind to me. It's the truth, and you know it.

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STELLA (*bursting out*): It's—— (*Checks herself*.) Well, I suppose it's embarrassing.

DR. KIRBY: I can talk to you properly. I see you now as a grown-up person.

STELLA (*with irony*): Thank you, Dad.

DR. KIRBY: Ah well—it's not easy for a parent. I suppose I ought to see Lilian and Wilfred as grown-up people now, too, but I can't. Not only because they're younger than you, but because there hasn't been the same break. I ought to be frank with them, but it's difficult.

STELLA (*gravely*): You can be frank with me, then?

DR. KIRBY: Yes. I find it quite easy.

STELLA (*after an effort*): Then—then why did you talk about "looking back when it's all nearly ended"? You're not really old, you know.

DR. KIRBY: I'm not young.

STELLA (*relieved*): Oh—is that all?

DR. KIRBY: No, I'm afraid it isn't. There's something I can tell you that I can't tell the other two. You can stand it. They can't. You're older. You have your profession. You're enjoying life. You've really done with us. So you can stand it.

STELLA *laughs bitterly*.

DR. KIRBY: What does that mean?

STELLA: Nothing. Go on. I can stand it. (*Suddenly alert, alarmed*.) Dad—does this mean that there's something wrong with you—that you're ill?

DR. KIRBY: Take it easy, Stella. I'm afraid it does. (*Smiling*.) One advantage of being in my profession is that you get to know what's happening inside you. I've got a bad heart. I had a very nasty bout of influenza a few years ago, and I did a very silly thing, the sort of thing I've warned hundreds of people against doing. I got up and started work again far too early. So I landed myself with a bad heart.

STELLA: But—what's wrong with it?

DR. KIRBY (*easily*): A lot of things. It's worse than my old bike. But you might describe the trouble—shortly—as a valvular lesion with inefficient compensation. Oh—I do what I can about it, of course. I don't work as hard as I used to do, though it's not easy to rest here. And I give myself digitalis—and other things. I get along—but——

STELLA: It's serious—then?

DR. KIRBY (*smiling*): No joke at all. In fact—I'm very glad you've come to see us now.

STELLA (*very distressed*): Dad!

DR. KIRBY: Easy, Stella! It seems a shabby trick landing you with this the minute you arrive, but I think you might have noticed something. And I'm telling you quite frankly so that you won't discuss it with Lilian and Wilfred. It's our little secret. Not much of one—but there you are.

STELLA: I shan't say anything.

DR. KIRBY: That's right. They haven't settled down to their lives yet as you have to yours. In fact, I'm sometimes a bit worried about Lilian. I'm not grumbling about myself. I've had a good run. I'd like to live long enough to see this country settling down a bit better.

STELLA: Oh—bother the country, I don't care about that. It's you.

DR. KIRBY: Yes, but this has been a very unsettling, worrying year so far. Two big strikes. Ulster arming for rebellion. Young women being forcibly fed in gaol. This health insurance business. Everybody wanting to rush about at thirty and forty miles an hour, up in the air as well as on the roads. Not much sunset calm about things. But in a year or two we may have settled down again. I like to think so.

STELLA (*in low voice*): I hope so—for your sake.

DR. KIRBY (*briskly*): Ah well—that's enough about me. Dismal stuff. I've got to hear about all your triumphs. Been all over the place, haven't you?

STELLA (*with forced animation*): Yes, all over. Like a crazy parcel.

DR. KIRBY: And enjoyed it, eh? Constant change, excitement, applause, eh? But don't let it spoil you.

STELLA (*with little ironic smile*): I'll do my best, Dad. Unless I'm spoilt already.

DR. KIRBY: No sign of it. I was against you leaving home and going on the stage, but chiefly, I think, for your mother's sake. I believe it does girls good to go out into the world.

STELLA: Sometimes.

DR. KIRBY (*lowering voice*): I've never said anything to her—and of course I've been glad to have her here—but I've often thought that Lilian's been at home too long. She might have done a lot better for herself if she'd followed your example and found something she wanted to do away from home. Don't tell her that.

STELLA: I won't. But probably she stayed on simply because I went. For your sake.

DR. KIRBY (*heartily*): Oh no, I don't think so. I never asked her to stay. She likes being at home. A lot of girls do, of course. Quite

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natural. (*Looks at his watch.*) Must be nearly supper time. Where's Lilian? (*Goes to door on left.*)

STELLA: I ought to be doing something.

DR. KIRBY: Nonsense. You're a guest. The work here's easy, and we've plenty to do it. Lilian and old Sarah—and a woman from the village comes in every day. (*LILIAN enters.*) Ah, Lilian, I was just wondering about supper. Stella must be hungry.

LILIAN: It'll be ready in about ten minutes.

DR. KIRBY: Good. (*Goes out, closing door behind him, LILIAN advancing into the room.*)

LILIAN: Your room's ready now, if you want to go up. And Wilfred's taken your trunk upstairs.

STELLA: Thanks, Lilian. I suppose I ought to go up. I'm probably filthy, but I've been too excited to care.

LILIAN: You look all right.

STELLA: We old travellers know all sorts of dodges. (*Stares at LILIAN.*)

LILIAN: What's the matter?

STELLA: You know—you're different.

LILIAN: Naturally. It's such a long time since you saw me last.

STELLA: Are you happy?

LILIAN (*rather impatiently*): I don't know. Isn't that—rather a silly question?

STELLA: Is it?

LILIAN: I think so. I mean, one isn't always asking oneself about happiness.

STELLA: I am.

LILIAN: Yes, you. You always were.

STELLA: And whether you ask or not, after all, you always know whether you're happy or not.

LILIAN: Most of the time one isn't either happy or unhappy.

STELLA: Like you—now?

LILIAN: Like me—now.

STELLA (*going over to her*): But there's something about you I don't understand.

LILIAN: Well, why bother?

STELLA (*taking her hands*): But, my dear, I want to bother. You talk as if we were strangers.

LILIAN: Aren't we? We haven't set eyes on one another for years.

STELLA: Yes, but I've been thinking about you all the time.

LILIAN: Even if you have, that's not enough. I'd only just left school when you went away. I'm quite different.

STELLA: I see that.

LILIAN (*looking down at STELLA's left hand*): We'll get to know one another again—perhaps. But don't force it.

STELLA (*trying to smile*): And that's not meant for a snub, I hope?

LILIAN (*gravely*): No. Tell me something.

STELLA (*lightly*): Anything.

LILIAN (*in low voice*): You're married, aren't you?

STELLA (*startled, but in low voice*): Yes. How did you know?

LILIAN: I saw the mark of the ring. (*STELLA stares at her left hand and rubs the ring finger.*)

STELLA (*troubled*): I'd probably have told you all—later. But please don't say anything—yet.

LILIAN: What happened?

STELLA: I married three years ago—in Australia. He was an actor, in the same company. After the first year it didn't work—very well. We've separated now.

LILIAN: Where is he?

STELLA: A week ago I couldn't have told you. We separated in America. But three days ago I called at my agent's in town—and I saw him there. We have the same agent. It was queer.

LILIAN: What's his name?

STELLA: Charles Appleby. He's not famous or anything. Just a goodish actor. Very nice family. And he can be quite charming—at times. We were very happy together for a little while.

LILIAN: And now you're separated.

STELLA (*with a pitiful smile*): Yes. All bust up. Yet I'm not really Stella Kirby any more, but Mrs. Charles Appleby, not living with her husband.

LILIAN: Is there going to be a divorce?

STELLA: I don't know. (*There is a ring heard through door on left.*) It's all a muddle. Let's stop talking about it. And please, Lilian, don't say anything. We'll talk afterwards, if you like.

Voices heard outside door on left. STELLA and LILIAN look towards it, the latter expectantly. WILFRED enters, followed by GEOFFREY FARRANT and DR. KIRBY. FARRANT is a fair brown-faced man in his late thirties, dressed in tweeds. There is still

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something of the regular officer in his appearance. He walks with a slight limp.

WILFRED: Stella, look who's here. Miss Kirby, this is Captain Farrant.

STELLA (*with animation*): Geoffrey! (*Holding out her hand.*)

FARRANT: Stella! (*Shaking hands.*) This is a surprise. (*Turning, off-handedly.*) Hello, Lilian.

STELLA: You've hardly changed at all, Geoffrey. How have you managed it?

FARRANT (*pleased and shy*): Oh—I don't know—quiet life—plenty of exercise, riding—that sort of thing. (*Looking at her, smilingly.*) You've not changed much yourself, you know.

STELLA: Not much! I suppose that really means I'm looking a hag?

FARRANT: Of course it doesn't. Anything but——. Matter of fact, you're looking prettier than ever. Isn't she, Dr. Kirby?

STELLA: Well, it's terribly nice seeing you again, Geoffrey. And so soon, too. I'd hardly hoped for that. And still living at the old place, too.

FARRANT: Yes, still at the old place. It's mine now, you know.

STELLA: Do you remember the birthday party you had, just after your leg got better, and we let that enormous pig loose from the farm?

FARRANT (*laughing*): Good lord, yes. Do you remember that?

STELLA: Of course I do. I remember everything. And that time when old Birtley got so drunk when the beagles were meeting at your house?

WILFRED: By jove, I remember that.

FARRANT: I should think you do. So do I. Poor old Birtley. I say, Stella, we *have* got something to talk about. It's going to take us days——

LILIAN (*cutting in*): Supper will be ready in a few minutes. I'll ask Sarah to tell you. (*Moving to door on left.*)

DR. KIRBY: Why, where are *you* going, Lilian?

LILIAN (*shortly*): I'm going to bed. I don't want any supper. I've got a headache. Good night. (*Goes out quickly.*)

FARRANT (*after a pause*): Oh I say—poor old Lilian.

DR. KIRBY: Didn't know she wasn't feeling well.

WILFRED (*carelessly*): She'll be all right. Just one of her moods. She's very queer sometimes. Best to leave her alone.

FARRANT: Excitement, perhaps. Stella coming back, eh?

ACT I

EDEN END

WILFRED: I say, Stella, did you see "Gipsy Love" at Daly's? I did. Been trying to play bits ever since. (*Going to piano.*) I've got the music of some of the new musical comedies. (*Holds up sheets.*) You're just the person I wanted. Come and play some of them.

STELLA: What, now?

WILFRED: Why not? Just a minute or two.

FARRANT: Go on, Stella. Fine to see you at the piano again. (*With mock air of gallantry, leads her over to the piano.*)

STELLA (*laughing*): All right. (*Sits down.*)

WILFRED: Try this one.

STELLA *begins playing a popular waltz number, with WILFRED standing by the piano and FARRANT looking on admiringly, and DR. KIRBY, seated, beating time. As she gets into the swing of the waltz she begins singing. SARAH opens door on left, and stands in doorway, smiling. Slow curtain as the music goes on.*

END OF ACT ONE

ACT II

Same as ACT I. Afternoon four days later.

WILFRED *is discovered. He is very uneasy. He approaches the telephone, hesitates, listens, then goes to door on left, looks to see if anybody is about, closes the door and comes back to telephone, reaches out as if to take off the receiver, and then hesitates again. Finally he comes away from it and picks up a copy of "Punch" that is lying on the table. Then the telephone bells rings. He dashes off to the telephone, obviously in high hopes.*

WILFRED (*at telephone, eagerly*): Yes? Yes? Hello. Yes? (*Is obviously disappointed.*) Oh—Dr. Philips. No, Dad—Dr. Kirby— isn't back yet. Yes, I'll see him, I expect. . . . Yes, in a few minutes. . . . At your house—Monday afternoon, three o'clock. I'll tell him. Good-bye.

As he leaves the telephone, SARAH enters from right.

SARAH: It'll be teeming down afore so long.

WILFRED (*gloomily*): Well, let it.

SARAH: Did Miss Stella take her mackintosh?

WILFRED: I don't know. I expect so.

SARAH: She'll want it.

WILFRED: You ought to see it rain in Africa.

SARAH: Does it rain there an' all?

WILFRED: Of course it does.

SARAH: Well I remember young Greenhead—the butcher's lad who went out to fight Kruger—telling me it never rained at all. All dry and dusty, he said it was. Never a drop o' water.

WILFRED: That's a different part of Africa. That's South Africa.

SARAH: Where are you then?

WILFRED: West Africa. Two thousand miles away. Quite different. Very hot and wet. Millions of blacks.

SARAH: Eh, fancy! And it only seems a week since you wor a little lad.

WILFRED: It's years since. And anyhow what's that got to do with it, Sarah, you old chump?

SARAH: A lot more nor you think. But then, lads has no sense. And they don't get ower-loaded with it when they stop being lads.

You can't stir up in the dootor's room for daft old birds' eggs.

WILFRED (*accusingly*): Sarah, you've broken some more.

SARAH: Only two. You can't move for 'em, and if you so much as look at 'em, they break.

WILFRED: You've gone and broken the only two specimens of the egg of the Great Spotted Gofoozle we have in the country.

SARAH: How do you know? You didn't see 'em.

WILFRED: I shall tell him.

SARAH: Master Wilfred, if you do that—— But you wouldn't, would you? You see, if you say nowt, he never misses 'em, for he's more eggs nor he knows what to do with. So long as he thinks they're all there, he's contented.

WILFRED: You're a wicked old woman.

SARAH: If you start telling on me, I'll tell on you.

WILFRED: Blackmail, that is. Besides, you've nothing to tell.

SARAH: What about them three cigars I saw you take?

WILFRED (*laughs*): Three cigars? Why, that's ages ago. At least seven years. Dad wouldn't care now. (*Listens.*) I think he's here, isn't he?

SARAH: Yes. I heard him. (*Going to door left.*) Nobody can say I'm hard o' hearing. I can still hear a lot better nor some of you. I'll ask him if he wants owt.

She goes out. WILFRED settles down with the "Punch". DR. KIRBY comes in, wearing an overcoat.

DR. KIRBY: Hello, Wilfred, any messages for me?

WILFRED: Yes. Dr. Philips of Martinbro just rang up to say that there'd be a meeting at his house next Monday afternoon at three.

DR. KIRBY: Next Monday at three? Well, I've no doubt some of us will be there, if our patients will let us.

WILFRED: What's it about? Health Insurance?

DR. KIRBY: Yes. Where are the girls this afternoon?

WILFRED: Geoffrey Farrant called for Stella, and they've gone out for a walk. And Lilian went out somewhere, I don't know where, about quarter of an hour ago. And I'm here, looking at "Punch".

DR. KIRBY: So I see. Good number?

WILFRED: Not so far. I don't see the point of some of these jokes. (*Turning pages.*) This for instance. (*Reads.*) Candid Friend (to M.F.H.): "I don't think much of your cubhunters, Jack." M.F.H.: "They're very useful horses; you see, we can either ride 'em or eat 'em." What's the point of that?

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DR. KIRBY: No idea. I'll have to look at the drawing.

WILFRED (*turning pages*): And here's another. Officer (visiting outpost: "If you saw one of the enemy, what would you do?" Sentry: "I calls 'em to halt." Officer: "Suppose he won't halt?" Sentry (with relish: "I takes and 'unts 'im wiv me bayonnet." I don't think that's very funny.

DR. KIRBY: It wouldn't be very funny for the enemy. I saw some photographs of bayonet wounds once.

WILFRED: My hat, no. I shouldn't like anybody after me with a bayonet.

DR. KIRBY: Well, I shouldn't worry. It isn't very likely that anybody will be. The world's got a lot more sense than it's given credit for in the newspapers. And it's got science now to help it.

WILFRED: Dad, are you sorry I didn't go in for something scientific? That I'm not a doctor, for instance?

DR. KIRBY: Not if you're happy as you are.

WILFRED: Well, I don't know that I'm *happy*.

DR. KIRBY (*hastily*): I didn't mean that. Silly word. Reasonably contented, let us say.

WILFRED: Well it's not bad, you know.

DR. KIRBY: After all, you're sceeing the world. More than I've ever done.

WILFRED (*hesitantly*): Yes. Only I don't seem to belong anywhere. I don't seem to belong to this place any more, and yet I can't really fit in with West Africa—nobody could.

DR. KIRBY: Well, that shouldn't bother you at your age. And after all, you've plenty of time. Years and years and years.

WILFRED (*hopefully*): Yes, that's true. Do you often wonder what you'll be like in ten years' time?

DR. KIRBY (*dryly*): Not often, no.

WILFRED: No, of course, naturally you wouldn't.

DR. KIRBY (*grimly amused*): Oh? Why?

WILFRED: Well, being older—you're completely settled, aren't you? You've always been here and——

DR. KIRBY: And I always will be, eh? You talk as if I wasn't so much perishable human stuff, just like yourself, but the Cow Rock up there on Eden moorside. I suppose that's how I seem. I was here, all complete, when you arrived, and I'll simply go on and on. That's the result of being a parent. You're an institution not a human being.

WILFRED: I wouldn't mind if I was a bit more of an institution,

Dad. Everything seems to slide away from me all the time. And I never seem to be in the right place.

DR. KIRBY (*briskly*): Partly liver, and partly boredom. You ought to be having a sharp walk now. (*Moving to door left.*) By the way, now that Stella's here—and looks like stopping a few weeks—I think we might entertain a bit more, don't you?

WILFRED: Good idea. If you can find anybody worth entertaining.

DR. KIRBY: Shouldn't be impossible. Just think of some people— young people, the sort Stella would like—we could have. (*SARAH appears at door on left.*) What is it, Sarah? Do you want me?

SARAH (*handing him note*): That little lad o' Mrs. Hepple's brought it.

DR. KIRBY (*glancing at it*): All right. I'll call. Back in about an hour or so, Wilfred, if anybody wants me.

He goes out, SARAH standing aside to let him pass. Then SARAH comes in, closing door behind her.

SARAH (*after waiting a moment*): Now I'll tell you what it is——

WILFRED (*picking up "Punch"*): Oh shut up, Sarah. I want to read.

SARAH (*offended*): That's a nice way to talk, isn't it?

WILFRED: No. But I want to be quiet.

SARAH (*moving slowly to door right*): I've seen the time when you'd have got a good slap from me for answering back like that. But now you're a big lad and I'm an old woman. Yes, and I know what you're telling yourself—a silly old woman. Well, old I may be, but I'm not so silly as some folk think——

WILFRED (*deliberately*): I want to read.

SARAH (*a parting shot*): And a lot o' good it'll do you.

She goes out, closing door behind her. WILFRED looks up, looking at both doors, then gets up. He is rather indecisive. He moves over to the telephone, takes a little book from his pocket rather as if to make doubly sure of the telephone number he wants than to find it for the first time, then stretches out a hand for the instrument, hesitates and listens, is relieved at hearing nothing, then puts his hand on the receiver again. SARAH opens the door on right.

SARAH (*with malicious triumph*): I thought you wanted to read.

WILFRED (*withdrawing from receiver, startled and angry, shouts*): What's it got to do with you what I want to do?

SARAH: That's not reading, playing about with that thing.

WILFRED (*not so loud*): That's my business.

SARAH: You've been wanting to get at it on the quiet, half the day.

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I've seen you. And not for the first time neither. And if you'd any sense you'd let it alone.

WILFRED: You don't know what you're talking about.

SARAH: Oh yes—I do. It may be all right for the doctor—folk being poorly and in a hurry—but no good'll come to you, talking down that thing. If it's worth saying, it's worth saying properly, instead o' gabbling into a daft machine. And if you thought anything o' the lass—

WILFRED (*sulkily*): How do you know it is a lass—as you call it?

SARAH: You wouldn't be making such a palaver if it worn't a lass. And she can't be up to so much when you've got to keep so quiet about her. Leave her alone, I say, and that telly-machine with her.

WILFRED: Oh—rats! And there's somebody coming now. You are a nuisance, Sarah.

SARAH: It'll be Miss Lilian.

They look towards door left. It is opened by CHARLES APPLEBY, who comes in, quite at ease. He is a man about forty, probably wearing rather loud Harris tweeds, very much the actor in the country. At this moment he is also wearing a very large ulster, which is spotted with rain. There are signs that he drinks too much. The evidence of breeding and charm is still there, but it is doubtful how much longer it will be there.

CHARLES (*smiling*): Beginning to rain. What a lot of rain we've had this autumn, haven't we?

WILFRED (*gaping at him*): Yes.

SARAH: Have you come to see Dr. Kirby?

CHARLES (*enjoying himself*): Not particularly. Now I'm not quite sure about you. But (*to SARAH*) I know who you are. You're Sarah.

SARAH: Well, what if I am?

CHARLES: Recognised you at once, you see. Heard a lot about you.

SARAH: Well, I've never set eyes on you before, young man.

CHARLES (*to WILFRED*): Not quite sure about you. Can't place you. But perhaps you're not one of the family here.

WILFRED: Yes I am. I'm Wilfred Kirby.

CHARLES (*smiling*): Of course. Well, I'm one of the family, too.

SARAH: That you're not.

CHARLES: Sorry, but I am. I'm Charlie Appleby.

SARAH: We're no wiser now.

CHARLES: This won't do. (*Turns and opens door, calling.*) I say—er,

LILIAN—Lilian—you'd better come and introduce me. They don't know anything about me in here. We're all very embarrassed.

WILFRED: I say, is this a joke?

CHARLES (*coming in from door*): Not much of one, old boy. (*Turning.*) Here's Lilian.

Enter LILIAN.

LILIAN: Wilfred, this is Mr.——

CHARLES: Whoa, stop! Not Mr. Just Appleby, Charlie Appleby—Charlie.

LILIAN (*rather grimly*): He's our brother-in-law. Stella's husband.

SARAH (*moving forward a step or two*): Never!

CHARLES: Sorry. Know how you feel, Sarah.

WILFRED: But look here—when—when did this happen?

CHARLES: Three years ago. In Australia. Let's complete the ceremony of introduction, shall we? (*Holds out a hand.*) How do you do?

WILFRED (*laughing nervously and shaking hands*): How do you do?

CHARLES (*moving forward and holding out a hand*): Sarah.

SARAH (*moving forward uncertainly*): And you really are Miss Stella's husband?

CHARLES: Mrs. Stella's husband. Yes.

SARAH (*bewildered and suspicious*): But she's never said a single word to me about it, not a single word. I can't understand it.

LILIAN (*rather sharply*): Just a minute, Sarah. I want you to help me.

She moves to door. SARAH follows slowly, with a puzzled and suspicious look at CHARLES. The latter notices it, though he is now lighting a cigarette. LILIAN and SARAH go out.

CHARLES: The poor old girl is convinced I'm an impostor. And I must say I never felt so much like one before.

WILFRED: But, you see, we didn't know anything about it.

CHARLES (*dryly*): No, I've gathered that.

WILFRED: She's been home four days, and never said a word.

CHARLES: Didn't know how to break the news, I expect. Difficult, sometimes. I'm not a good news-breaker myself.

WILFRED: Are you on the stage, too?

CHARLES: Such is fame. Am I on the stage!

WILFRED: I'm sorry—but——

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CHARLES: Don't apologise. I expect you lead a quiet life. It looks a quiet life, from the little I've seen of it.

WILFRED: Oh—I'm only home on leave. From Africa.

CHARLES: Soldier?

WILFRED: No, I'm with the British West African Trading Company.

CHARLES: This family gets about a bit, doesn't it? And why I'm still wearing this damned thing, I don't know. (*Begins taking off his ulster. WILFRED gives him a hand with it.*) I've been on the stage twenty years. Ran away from Oxford to go on the stage. Been all over, played nearly everything. Juvenile leads. Character parts now. Soon I'll be doing the heavies. What a life!

WILFRED: Don't you like it?

CHARLES: Never been able to decide. Do you like Africa?

WILFRED: I'm not sure. (*They both laugh.*) I say, are you staying here?

CHARLES: Looks like it, doesn't it?

WILFRED: I hope you are.

CHARLES: Why?

WILFRED: Well, we might go round a bit. Unless you want to be with Stella all the time.

CHARLES (*dryly*): No, I don't think I shall want to be with Stella all the time, old boy. Certainly let's go round a bit. I can't imagine where we'll go, from the little I've seen of the neighbourhood, but no doubt you know where the lads of the village—the ber-hoys, the kernuts—disport themselves. I don't suppose you come all the way from West Africa simply to watch the rain dripping off the old stone walls—do you?

WILFRED: Rather not.

CHARLES: You must take me round, you must show me the sights, and we'll see if we can't have some fun. I've never been to a place yet—and I've been to some dam' rum places—where one couldn't have some fun if one tried.

WILFRED: I'll do my best for you.

CHARLES (*yawning*): Matter of fact, you're a find. I'd forgotten about you. I saw myself simply having some grim chats about appendicitis in the surgery with your governor. What's he like, by the way?

WILFRED: Oh—Dad's all right.

CHARLES: To tell you the truth, I wasn't looking forward to meeting him. After all, it's a bit thick suddenly having a son-in-law thrust on

you. Actor, too. Greasy hair, dirty collar. No money. Probably a bad lot.

WILFRED (*enthusiastically*): I think it's going to be fun, having you here.

CHARLES: Thank God somebody thinks so. But I'm not in good form at the moment. Feel half dead. Got up too early to catch that train. And what a train! (LILIAN *enters*.) I'm just saying I feel half dead after that train.

LILIAN: I hope you don't mind a camp bed.

CHARLES: Not at all, so long as it isn't the kind that tries to fold itself up again in the middle of the night.

WILFRED: No, it's all right. But, look here, you can have my bed and I'll have the camp bed.

LILIAN: Well, you can settle it between you, because I've put him in your room, Wilfred.

WILFRED: Good. (*Hesitates*.) Though—I say—oughtn't he to be—you know?

LILIAN (*briskly*): That's all right. I'm running this house.

CHARLES: Running it very well, too, I should think. I'd like to turn in for an hour if nobody's any objection.

LILIAN: No, I expect you're tired. Are you hungry?

CHARLES: No, thanks. I'm not hungry. But I'm devilish thirsty. Could I have a drink?

LILIAN: Would you like some tea?

CHARLES (*with mock gravity*): Sorry, but it doesn't agree with me. If there's such a thing as a whisky and soda going——

WILFRED: There's some in the dining-room.

LILIAN (*moving to door left*): Come along. And I'll show you where your room is. Then I must go out again.

CHARLES (*following her*): I'll take my drink up to my room and not be in anybody's way.

They go out, and WILFRED follows them. The room is darker now. The rain can be heard. After a moment WILFRED returns, carrying a mackintosh and a cap. He closes the door after him, carefully, then goes to the telephone nervously. Once more he looks at his little book. Then he takes off the receiver. He is very nervous, and catches his breath as he talks.

WILFRED (*at telephone*): Hello . . . I want *Denly Two Six*. . . . Hello, is that *Denly Two Six*? Is that the "White Hart"? . . . Could I speak to Miss Alice Murgatroyd, please? . . . Oh, but you could

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get her, couldn't you? . . . It's—er—a friend. . . . Yes, it's *important*. . . . Oh, thanks very much. . . . Oh (*gasps*) is that you, Alice? It's Wilfred . . . (*Louder.*) Wilfred—you know—Wilfred Kirby . . . (*Disappointed.*) Didn't you recognise my voice? . . . Oh, I see. . . . Do you remember the other night? Listen, can I see you to-day? . . . Oh no, it isn't the same thing at all seeing you in the bar. . . . But I must see you alone . . . please, Alice. . . . Oh (*Disappointed.*) . . . But listen, if you don't go on duty until seven, I could see you before then. I'd come over at once. . . . But you can't have so much to do. (*Joyfully.*) Oh, good. I'll come over at once on my bike. . . . (*Desperately again.*) No, honestly, it isn't raining much. It's nothing. Really. And it'll probably be all over by the time I get there. . . . All right. At the bridge, eh? . . . Oh, but you must be there. . . . Hello, hello.

He puts down the receiver, breathes hard, wipes his forehead, and puts on his mackintosh. He hears voices through door on left, so after one glance in that direction hurries out through door on right. The room now is almost dark. The door on left opens and STELLA and FARRANT come in, both wearing wet overcoats or mackintoshes.

STELLA: Nobody in, thank goodness. We can still go on talking. Will you light the lamps?

FARRANT: Yes. And it won't be the first time I've done it here, either. (*He strikes a match and lights the lamps.*) Aren't you awfully wet?

STELLA: Wettish. (*Takes off her coat.*) I think we'd better put our coats in the nursery to dry. Give me yours.

FARRANT (*taking off his*): No, I'll take them both in. Give me yours.

He takes the coats into room on right. STELLA tidies her hair, shakes out her skirt, and so forth. She is dressed now in country clothes, different from those in Act One. Then she hums a tune. She is obviously happy.

FARRANT (*returning*): Nice in here after the rain outside. Looks—cosy.

STELLA (*laughs*): That's very elderly of you, Geoffrey.

FARRANT: I don't see that. Always like to be cosy after I've been out. Did when I was a boy. (*They both sit down.*) This is when a pipe tastes its best, indoors after the wind and the rain. (*Holds up his pipe.*) Do you mind?

STELLA: I've told you before, I adore your pipe. I think I'll smoke, too. Have you a cigarette for me, please?

FARRANT: Yes, of course. (*Holds out a case. She takes one.*)

STELLA (*holding up the cigarette, smiling*): Do you mind?

FARRANT: I admit I *have* objected to women smoking, in my time. But I don't mind when you do it.

STELLA: You mean, it doesn't matter if a tough old hag like me takes to such bad habits?

FARRANT: Don't talk such rot, Stella. You're prettier than ever. And there never was anybody less *tough*—as you call it.

STELLA: You're becoming suspiciously neat at this sort of thing, Geoffrey, much better than you used to be. You've had lots of practice while I've been away. (*He lights her cigarette, and then lights his pipe.*) Well, the walk didn't last long, and there was too much rain—but I loved it.

FARRANT: That's good.

STELLA: The rain suits this country here.

FARRANT: Good thing it does. We get plenty of it.

STELLA (*dreamily*): I wonder if you can understand what it means to come back after being so long away.

FARRANT: Of course I can. I was away over two years during the Boer War. Don't forget that.

STELLA: No, I'm not. But I've been away much longer than that. It seems centuries. Dirty provincial towns. Dozens of 'em. They may not have all been dirty, but looking back on them they seem grimy and dreary. Horsehair sofas, huge double beds in tiny dark bedrooms, landings smelling of cabbage and old blankets. Stinking little dressing-rooms. Stage doors down back streets.

FARRANT: Sounds beastly. Marvel to me how you stuck it.

STELLA: Then London. The real London. Cheap digs in Victoria and Paddington. Meals in tea shops. Fog for days and days. No space, no fresh air.

FARRANT: But it was better when you went away touring?

STELLA: Yes, we saw a lot. Some of the places were lovely. And some—weren't. But, my dear, there was nothing like this anywhere.

FARRANT: There isn't, you know, if it's your own country.

STELLA (*ecstatically*): The grey stone walls climbing up the moors, Geoffrey. The little streams dashing down. The ling and the bracken. The green, green fields. The huge dark brooding hills. That heathery, salty, fresh smell. Oh—lovely, lovely. I feel like someone who's just been let out of prison. I'm alive again. You don't read poetry, do you, Geoffrey?

FARRANT (*apologetically*): Not much. Kipling, y'know. But can't get on with most of the others.

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STELLA: Well, there are two lines of Wordsworth's that give me this country as nothing else does. I've repeated them over and over again—in hot dressing-rooms, in railway carriages when I couldn't sleep, in all kinds of hellish places—and they've always brought me back home here.

FARRANT: Good for them! What are they?

STELLA: They're at the very end of some ridiculous poem about a young shepherd coming into an estate. I remember the two lines that come before, so I'll put them in too. (*Quoting, giving the last two lines with deep feeling.*)

“Love had he found in huts where poor men lie;
His daily teachers had been wood and rills;
The silence that is in the starry sky,
The sleep that is among the lonely hills”.

FARRANT: Say the last bit again.

STELLA:

“The silence that is in the starry sky,
The sleep that is among the lonely hills”.

FARRANT (*thoughtfully*): I get what he's driving at there, y'know. That's Wordsworth, is it? I must tackle him again.

STELLA *laughs*.

FARRANT: What's the joke?

STELLA: I suddenly saw you—in that den of yours at the Manor—*tackling* Wordsworth.

FARRANT (*after short laugh*): You can understand why I stay on at the old place——

STELLA: Heavens, yes.

FARRANT: There isn't really a lot to do, looking after the estate, and sometimes I've told myself I'm a slacker, just hanging on there, doing a bit of hunting and shooting. I'd have been glad to have stayed in the army, of course, but my leg made that impossible. And, somehow, I've never been attracted to anything else. Probably because I don't want to leave the old place.

STELLA: You must never leave it.

FARRANT: Old Bickley, the shoemaker here in Eden End—he's a Socialist—always tells me that sooner or later he and his pals will have me out of the Manor and the estate. And I always tell him that if they do, he'll have to give me a job—cobbling with him. He's not a bad sort, Old Bickley, though he does talk a lot of hot air.

STELLA: I remember him. A nice old thing. I remember when I was a little girl somebody—it may have been Sarah—told me that Mr.

Bickley didn't believe in God, and after that I used to look at him with horror. He had a fascination for me. I could see him going to Hell. You know, these last few days, I've been thinking again of my childhood. Things—oh, dozens of things—I'd forgotten have suddenly come back.

FARRANT: Do you like that?

STELLA: Yes. Even though some of the things are unhappy things.

FARRANT: I hope I wasn't one of 'em.

STELLA: No, you come in afterwards, Geoffrey. When I was growing up—or when I thought I was growing up. When I was (*in absurd tone*) a girl.

FARRANT: You're still a girl.

STELLA: My dear man, don't be ridiculous. I'm a woman. Very soon—horrors—I shall be an *old girl*.

FARRANT: That puts me well into the decayed class, then, for I'm older than you.

STELLA: It's different for a man. You're merely coming within sight of maturity.

FARRANT: I hope I'm maturing well.

STELLA: You're maturing beautifully, Geoffrey.

FARRANT: Nevertheless, you've changed, and I haven't.

STELLA: How have I changed? (*Hastily.*) If it's something unpleasant, don't tell me. I won't have to-day spoilt.

FARRANT: It isn't unpleasant.

STELLA: Go on, then, and tell me all about it.

FARRANT: When I've thought about you——

STELLA: Oh, have you thought about me?

FARRANT (*gravely*): I've thought about you a lot. Wondered where you were, what you were doing, and so on, and I've always thought that after being on the stage and knocking up and down——

STELLA: I don't know that I want to be one who has knocked up and down.

FARRANT: Well, you know what I mean. I thought that you'd be much harder. Harder, that is, than you used to be.

STELLA: And I was hard enough to you, wasn't I? Poor Geoffrey. I was a nasty, cocky, little beast.

FARRANT: No, you weren't. But you led me an awful dance sometimes, didn't you?

STELLA: I did. And now I apologise for it. Never mind, Geoffrey. I treated you very badly, and you've been well revenged since.

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FARRANT: Oh? How? Who by?

STELLA: Don't look so alarmed. I mean by—well—life. I thought I knew everything then. I knew nothing, and when that fact was forced upon me, it hurt. But go on. You thought I'd be harder still.

FARRANT: Yes. And you're not. You're—

STELLA: Softer. (*Laughs.*) Oh—but I don't want to be softer. It sounds horrid.

FARRANT: I didn't mean that. You know I'm no good at this sort of thing.

STELLA (*gently*): You're much better than you think you are. Besides, I've had the misfortune to meet a lot of men who prided themselves on being good at this sort of thing.

FARRANT: All blighters, I'll bet.

STELLA: Yes, Geoffrey. Mostly blighters.

FARRANT: What I meant to say was, that you're still yourself—Stella—but you're nicer, kinder—dash it, I'll say it—gentler than you used to be. At least to me you are.

STELLA: I'm glad you think so. I should like to be. I've learnt a good deal these last eight years. I've often thought how badly I treated you in the old days here. And—miles away—years away—I've been ashamed. Sometimes, just lately, I've been tempted to write and tell you so. But I didn't know what had happened to you. You might easily have forgotten all about me.

FARRANT (*in a low voice*): I've tried hard enough.

STELLA: I can understand that.

FARRANT: I wanted to get on with my own life. You'd got on with yours. That's reasonable, isn't it?

STELLA: Yes. And I should think that's what was the matter with it. Too reasonable.

FARRANT: Yes, too reasonable. I knew that the moment I came in here, the other night, and saw you again. I hadn't been doing badly the last year or two.

STELLA: At forgetting me?

FARRANT: Yes. I'd even been able to come here a good deal—sometimes to see your father, and Wilfred when he was on leave, but chiefly to see Lilian. I've seen a lot of her, you know.

STELLA: Yes, I gathered that.

FARRANT: Lilian's a fine girl, you know.

STELLA: I'm sure she is. That sounds absurd, doesn't it, when I'm her sister. But the fact is, I don't know her very well now. She's grown-up, and she's changed in the process, I suppose. But I'm sure

there's something very strong and fine about her. She always had more courage and strength and honesty than I had. (*As he is about to protest.*) No, I mean that. Do you think I don't know myself now? I'm changeable, I'm weak, and I'm a coward.

FARRANT: You're not.

STELLA: You don't know, my dear. I'm being weak and cowardly at this very moment.

FARRANT: I don't believe you.

STELLA (*almost in tears, but smiling*): I don't want you to believe me. (*Smiling at him.*) Dear Geoffrey.

FARRANT: You may be changeable. I don't know. But I know this. I'm not changeable. (*Goes over and takes her hands.*) I loved you years ago. I love you now, just the same. I see why nobody's ever meant anything all this time. It's because of you. There's only you. I love you, Stella.

He looks down at her. She raises her face to him and he kisses her. Then she rests her head against his sleeve, closing her eyes. Nothing is said. Then she makes a little gesture with her hand that releases her.

FARRANT: I may not be able to read poetry, Stella, but I've imagined that—over and over again.

STELLA (*with a tiny smile*): I've thought of it too—sometimes.

FARRANT: By jove, have you? If I'd known that I'd have come charging all over Australia and the United States looking for you. See what I've missed!

He threatens to kiss her again, but she holds up a hand and shakes her head.

No, probably you're right. Now we've got to talk.

STELLA: Yes, but not the kind of talk you mean, Geoffrey. No plans, no arrangements, no time tables, no—"seeing how we stand". Nothing like that.

FARRANT (*bewildered*): Oh!

STELLA: We can't be always arranging ourselves in the world's eye, like goods in a smart shop window. Not that sort of talk at all. Just idle, foolish talk that gets you nowhere, that means nothing and yet can mean everything. It doesn't matter now who we are or how we stand, or anything like that. Just think of the two of us here, in a cosy little room, lost in the moorland rain. We're lost too. There isn't anybody else. Just us. And time's stopped for us.

FARRANT: I see. At least I think I do.

STELLA (*dreamily*): Or we needn't talk at all, if you like. Just be

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quiet. Trying to make time stand still for us. It flies at a terrible speed really, Geoffrey.

FARRANT: Oh, I don't know. Things don't change much.

STELLA: They do. Even in ten years time—in Nineteen Twenty-two—what a queer year that sounds, doesn't it——

FARRANT: We shall only be in our forties.

STELLA: I know. And yet everything may be different. You never know. We might look back at this year and see it—oh, a thousand years away. In another world, a lost world.

FARRANT: But things don't change much here.

STELLA: Yes, they do. I haven't been away so long, yet it's all different really. Mother gone. Wilfred and Lilian grown-up—half strangers. Father much older—too old. I sound like Stevenson's Wanderer. Do you remember the verse I used to keep saying over and over again?

She repeats the verse beginning "Home was home then, my dear", very softly.

"Home was home then, my dear, full of kindly faces.

Home was home then, my dear, happy for the child.

Fire and the windows bright glittered on the moorland.

Song, tuneful song, built a palace in the wild."

Just before the end the door on left opens quietly and CHARLES stands there, looking like a man who has just had a nap. FARRANT stares at him in surprise. When STELLA sees him she gives a sharp cry and stands with a hand pressed against her heart.

CHARLES: Sorry if I startled you, Stella, but I didn't want to interrupt the performance.

STELLA (with an enormous effort): Charles!

CHARLES (cheerfully): Didn't they tell you I was coming? Too bad. Wanted to make a surprise of it, I suppose. Something to pass the long autumn evening.

STELLA: But how did you get here?

CHARLES: Train, my dear. Train from town. Hours and hours and hours of it, and started about dawn. I'm feeling a bit muzzy too. (Indicating FARRANT, who is standing rigid.) I'm afraid we're embarrassing your friend—this gentleman. Hadn't you better introduce me?

STELLA (silent a moment, then making a big effort): Geoffrey, this is Charles Appleby—my husband. Captain Farrant.

CHARLES: How d'you do? An old friend of my wife's, I expect. Think I've heard her mention you. (Looks shrewdly from one to the

other.) If you'll excuse me one minute, I'll go and get myself a drink. Always get thirsty on trains, most curious thing.

He goes out. FARRANT *stares at* STELLA.

FARRANT: Is this true?

STELLA: Yes.

FARRANT: But why didn't you tell me?

STELLA (*with a miserable smile*): I told you I was weak and cowardly, didn't I?

FARRANT (*contemptuously*): Yes, but I didn't know it was as bad as that.

STELLA: Please, Geoffrey, don't try to hurt me. I'm hurt enough as it is.

FARRANT: What about me? I suppose you think I'm enjoying myself.

STELLA (*in tears*): Please, Geoffrey. It isn't as bad as it seems. We were married three years ago. We've been separated for nearly a year now. I don't know why he's here. I didn't ask him here.

FARRANT: I don't think I want to hear any more about it just now. I must go.

STELLA: Only a few minutes ago I was happy. I thought it couldn't last long. It didn't even last as long as I thought.

FARRANT: It didn't deserve to last a second. I'll get my coat.

Goes to room on right. STELLA makes a great effort to avoid breaking down altogether. As FARRANT re-appears with his cap and coat, CHARLES appears in the other doorway with a whisky and soda in his hand.

CHARLES: What? Going?

FARRANT (*curtly*): Yes. Good-bye.

STELLA *turns away from them.* CHARLES *stands aside to let FARRANT pass.* FARRANT *goes out.* *You hear the outer door bang outside.* STELLA *is still turned away.*

CHARLES (*who has no malice in him, an insensitive, good-humoured chap*): I'm sorry, Stella. Didn't mean to barge in at the wrong moment like that. Always putting my foot in it. No tact. It's just cost me a job. You'll laugh when I tell you about it.

STELLA *sits down, away from him, and stares straight in front of her. She is not sulking, but is temporarily oblivious of anything at the moment but her own misery.*

Shall I tell you? Perhaps I'd better keep it. No good spoiling the story. But you will laugh when I tell you.

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He takes a good gulp of his whisky and soda, and looks across at her rather wistfully.

STELLA (*in a muffled voice*): Why have you come here?

CHARLES (*trying to keep it light*): Oh—well—you see, I was resting and a bit fed up with town. Thought the change might do me good. All in order, you know. I had an invitation to come down here. I thought it might have come—indirectly—from you.

STELLA: It didn't.

CHARLES: No, I'm gathering that. Nobody seems to know much about me here. Haven't met your father yet.

STELLA: No—that's not going to be easy.

CHARLES: Why?

STELLA: I can't explain.

CHARLES: I'm beginning to feel like a baby that's turned up at a wedding. A warm welcome was given to Mr. Charles Appleby, always a favourite in the North of England. Good old Charlie, they cried.

STELLA (*wearily*): Oh—don't be funny, Charlie.

CHARLES: Well, I've got to be something. Damn it, look at it from my point of view. I've got feelings as well as you and your old friend, the bronzed, clean-living English gentleman who's just pushed off in a temper. I come here because I'm invited. I imagine you've something to do with it. After all, you're still my wife. I get up at some unearthly hour this morning—in pitch darkness—travel most of the day, and then when I arrive here, I'm treated as if I were a bad dose of small-pox.

STELLA: Oh, I know. It's not your fault.

CHARLES: By the way, what's the telephone number here?

STELLA: I don't know. It's there.

CHARLES (*goes over to telephone, and notes number*): I must send it to the agents. They may want me in a hurry. One or two new tours going out. Somebody said something about *Old Heidelberg* touring again. And *The Monk and the Woman*. A title like that ought to bring 'em in. You know that Hilda Moore's touring in *Bella Donna*. If she wants to get back to town and they want to keep the tour going, there might be a chance for you there—you've played Hilda Moore parts.

STELLA: I've finished with the theatre.

CHARLES: Don't believe it. I've heard that before. Nobody's finished with the theatre until the theatre's finished with them. You'll be working again in a month.

STELLA (*shaking her head*): I shan't.

CHARLES: I've said that, you know. We all have. Meant it too when we've said it. I remember once—it was about two years before I met you—I was out in *A Message From Mars*—and——

Enter LILIAN, carrying account books, etc.

CHARLES: Hullo! You look business-like.

LILIAN: I have to do Dad's accounts.

STELLA (*with hostility*): Why?

LILIAN: He's so forgetful now.

STELLA: Oh. I haven't noticed it.

LILIAN: You haven't been here long enough to notice it.

CHARLES (*looking from one to the other*): Er . . . no. I think I'll have a look round. (*He escapes. Nothing is said for a moment.*)

STELLA: It was you, of course, who asked Charles to come here.

LILIAN: Yes.

STELLA: How did you find him?

LILIAN: You'd told me his name and you said that you both had the same agent. When I was helping to turn out your room, I saw a letter from your agent——

STELLA: I see. Quite simple. These things usually are if you don't mind going into other people's rooms and reading their letters.

LILIAN: Perhaps if you'd condescended to do your own room—instead of going out for a walk with Geoffrey, I shouldn't have seen the letter.

STELLA: I wasn't asked to help with the housework here, was told, in fact, not to do anything. On the other hand, I was asked to go for a walk by Geoffrey. But that has nothing to do with it. You read my letter, probably read all my letters.

LILIAN: I've not the least desire to read your letters. That particular one happened to be lying open on your dressing-table. Your agent's name and address on it were big enough to be read a yard away.

STELLA: I'm glad he saved your eyesight. Why did you ask Charles to come here? It was no business of yours. I'd told you that we had separated. We haven't lived together for over a year. We haven't spoken to one another, haven't seen one another—except the other day at the agent's—for months and months. If I'd wanted him here, I would have asked him myself. You'd no right to interfere. And if it had been anybody else but Charles—who's a fool—he'd never have come here on such an invitation.

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LILIAN: Three years ago, you were sufficiently in love with him to marry him. Now you can't stand him in the same house.

STELLA: That's my affair.

LILIAN: By the way, I've put him in Wilfred's room.

STELLA: I suppose I ought to be grateful you haven't put him into my bed.

LILIAN: You needn't be disgusting.

STELLA: And you needn't be such a beastly little hypocrite. Why did you send for him?

LILIAN: He was your husband. You weren't happy, I could see that. I thought you'd like another chance.

STELLA: All lies. You're still talking like a beastly little hypocrite. You're lying, Lilian, you're lying. *Why did you send for him?*

LILIAN: I've told you.

STELLA: You've told me nothing, and you know it. But I'll make you tell the truth. You made me confess about my marriage, you've read my letters, you've interfered in my private affairs—and now you imagine you can put me off with a few silly lies. (*Going nearer.*) Do you think I'm a fool?

LILIAN (*contemptuously*): Yes.

STELLA, *blazing with fury, slaps her face, hard. The effect is very marked on each.* LILIAN stands rigid, filled with a cold anger.

STELLA steps back and then turns away, trembling, her anger rapidly vanishing. She sits down.

STELLA: I oughtn't to have done that. I'm sorry, Lilian.

LILIAN (*contemptuously*): It doesn't make me think you any less of a fool. It's like nearly everything else you do—violent and silly and useless.

STELLA (*roused again*): Is it? Well, I'll tell you now why you sent for Charles. It had nothing to do with me and my marriage. You don't care a rap about that. Do you?

LILIAN (*calmly*): Not much. Why should I?

STELLA: No, you did it because you're in love with Geoffrey Farrant. What's the use of pretending? You know. And I know. You're in love with Geoffrey, and you're terrified of losing him. I knew that the very first night I came back, when you went sulking off to bed, pretending you'd a headache. Even before that, before Geoffrey called, the moment I arrived, I knew there was *something*. You didn't really want me back here. I felt at once there was something resentful about you.

LILIAN (*herself roused now, but still colder and harder than the other*):

And why should there be anything else? Why should you expect us all to fall on your neck the minute you condescended to come home again?

STELLA: That's unfair——

LILIAN: It isn't. And if you didn't think about yourself all the time, you'd soon see that. You always had more of everything than Wilfred and I had. Before you went away, you let Geoffrey fall in love with you, made him follow you round, laughed at him—yes, and to us, and even then I hated you for it——

STELLA: I cared more for Geoffrey then than you think.

LILIAN: I don't believe you know what it is to love anybody properly. You think being sentimental is caring for people. It isn't. Then you insisted on going on the stage, although you knew very well that mother had a horror of theatres. She couldn't help it. That's how she'd been brought up. You went away, without caring how much mother and father were worrying.

STELLA: That's not true. I oared terribly. You can't begin to understand——

LILIAN: That helped to kill mother.

STELLA (*breaking down*): Oh—you're cruel, Lilian. That's not true.

LILIAN: Yes, it is. You said you'd make me tell the truth, and here it is. Mother died. Father was left lonely and miserable. I didn't want to stay here all my life. I had plans of my own. But I had to stay then, to look after the house and father. He needed me.

STELLA (*through her tears*): He didn't. If you'd decided to do something away from home he wouldn't have tried to stop you. He simply thought you wanted to stay at home.

LILIAN: How do you know?

STELLA: He—oh it doesn't matter. The point is, you stayed at home because you wanted to stay at home. And now you're making a great virtue out of it. You're one of these self-appointed martyrs.

LILIAN: I'm not pretending to be a martyr. I'm simply explaining why I didn't think you were so very wonderful. You went off, not caring about us, to do what you wanted to do. And while you were enjoying yourself, you didn't bother about us. You could even get married without telling us. Then, when you thought you'd had enough of the stage and had made a mess of your marriage, you decided to come home.

STELLA: Yes, and you seem to forget that, after all, it's my home just as much as it's yours.

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LILIAN: No, it isn't, and you know very well it isn't. It stopped being your home when you ran away from it years ago. And it's my home, more than ever, because I've stuck to it and helped to keep it going. We'd made a life here without you, and now you have to come charging back into it, upsetting everyone.

STELLA: Upsetting everyone? You seem to forget that everybody here was glad to see me again—except you.

LILIAN: Yes, and a lot of good it'll do them.

STELLA: All you're thinking about is Geoffrey, only you won't admit it.

LILIAN: I'm not afraid of admitting it. I do love Geoffrey—I have done for years—and I believe I could make him happy. And I know you couldn't, and wouldn't even try very long.

STELLA: So you made up your mind at once that he must see for himself that I have a husband. Oh—yes, they've met already. I'm sorry you weren't here.

LILIAN: It wasn't just that. You have a life of your own—a life that you've made quite apart from us—you can't run away from it.

STELLA: But you see, I'm away from it now. And I'm not running back to it. You've done your best. Charles is here—and he's a nuisance—but he won't stay long. But I'm staying. You've played your trick, Lilian—and a very dirty little trick it was—but you haven't won. Nothing has happened except that now I realise that either you've changed completely or I never really knew you.

LILIAN: I can't see that it matters which it is.

STELLA (*distressed*): What does matter to me is that you and I could have talked to one another as we have done. I've never even tried to hurt you, and you've deliberately hurt me. I'd looked forward so much to seeing you again. We'd shared so many things before. I thought we'd be able to have a wonderful time together. If you'd been open and friendly from the first, I couldn't have taken anything, anybody, away from you. I could have been happy just because you were happy. Oh—Lilian—you wouldn't be so hard if you hadn't been shut up here so long in a safe little corner. It's because you don't know how much misery there is in the world, how circumstances and time can change and hurt us.

LILIAN: You're not really unhappy now. In a way you're enjoying it. You see, I'm not made like that. I can't enjoy my emotions.

CHARLES *appears in doorway on left*.

CHARLES (*to STELLA*): I say, Stella, your father's just come in. He thinks I'm a patient. You'd better come and explain. (*He goes out.*)

ACT II

EDEN END

STELLA (*in a low voice*): I hope you don't think I'm going to enjoy this.

LILIAN (*scornfully*): You're not afraid of Dad, are you?

STELLA: I'm afraid for him. You can't begin to understand how hateful this is going to be for me. (*She goes to the door and calls, with assumed cheerfulness.*) Dad!

DR. KIRBY (*off*): Yes.

STELLA: Just a minute.

She goes off, banging the door to behind her. LILIAN sits down to her accounts and gradually loses control of herself. As the curtain falls, she is crying.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT III

SCENE I

As before. Late on Saturday night. When the curtain rises, the room is empty. Lamps are lit, but turned low. There is a good fire. On the table are a tray, holding a thermos flask, small bottle of brandy, a glass and some biscuits, and another tray with whisky decanter and soda syphon and glasses on it. A clock outside in the hall strikes twelve. Before it has finished striking the voices of CHARLES and WILFRED are heard outside. CHARLES enters first and begins turning up the lights. He is dressed as in ACT II. WILFRED staggers in, with a folded mackintosh slung over one shoulder, and he sticks to this for some time. They are both drunk. WILFRED is the worse of the two. It should be quite obvious that they are drunk, but they must not indulge in the usual antics, and though their voices are thick, they must be clearly heard. There must be no hiccupping.

CHARLES (*looking round the room*): Nice. Very nice. I call this very snug, old boy.

WILFRED: Not bad qua'ers, not bad qua'ers at all. Wish I'd something like this in Bri'sh West.

CHARLES (*solemnly*): In where, old boy?

WILFRED (*solemnly*): Bri'sh West.

CHARLES: Never heard of it.

WILFRED (*deliberately*): Bri-tish West—Africa.

CHARLES: Oh—yes. Africa. I've been to Africa—South Africa. It's all right, Africa is, old boy.

WILFRED (*very seriously*): It's fine. I like Africa, Charlie.

CHARLES (*wandering round*): Quite right. We pass Africa. (*Going to table.*) Hello, drinks. But what's this business?

WILFRED (*peering at the thermos flask*): That's for my father.

CHARLES: Where is he?

WILFRED (*waving a hand*): Out—working. Somebody somewhere must be very ill. Having a baby p'r'aps. Or pegging out.

CHARLES: And your poor old governor's looking after 'em.

WILFRED: Yes, and that's for when he comes in. Hot milk. Brandy. Biscuits. And he deserves 'em, Charlie.

CHARLES: He does, old boy. He's a noble fellow. As soon as I saw

him—yesterday afternoon—I said to myself: “Stella’s father—my father-in-law—he’s a noble old fellow.” I think we ought to drink his health.

WILFRED (*solemnly*): I ag-agree.

CHARLES *pours out two whiskies and sodas during the next two speeches.*

CHARLES (*with air of profundity*): If my old man had been a doctor, a lot of things would have been different—very different. But he wasn’t.

WILFRED: What was he—your old man?

CHARLES (*very solemnly*): Nothing, old boy—nothing. Just a bloody English gentleman. But never mind him. (*Sternly, raising glass.*) Here’s to Dr. Kirby—a noble old fellow.

WILFRED (*raising glass*): Here’s to him—good old Dad.

CHARLES (*still solemnly*): Let’s sit down.

WILFRED: Yes.

They sit down. CHARLES lights a cigarette. WILFRED looks rather sleepy.

CHARLES: You know, old boy—we’ve had a good evening. I told you yesterday—when we first met—I said then “We can go out—you and I—and have a good evening here.” Didn’t I?

WILFRED: You did.

CHARLES: Well, we’ve had one. What was the name of the fellow that gave us a lift in the trap?

WILFRED: Harper.

CHARLES: Harper. A very nice fellow—Harper. But he was badly screwed, y’know, old boy. He ought to have let us drive.

WILFRED: I met a fellow on the boat coming home called Harper. He came from Manchester and he had a glass eye. I hate glass eyes.

CHARLES: And I hate Manchester. If I’d to choose between a glass eye and Manchester, I’d rather have a glass eye. You meant a glass eye, old boy, didn’t you—and not an eye glass?

WILFRED: Yes, glass eye. One of our chaps in the Company—

CHARLES: What company? You’re not on the stage, you’re in Africa.

WILFRED: Yes, I mean the Bri’sh West African Company. He has an eye glass. He says he used to own two racehorses when he was home. Awful nut.

CHARLES: Probably lying, old boy. There’s a terrible lot of lying

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about. When you're my age you'll have found that out. Everybody lies like the devil. Women worse than men.

WILFRED: That's true, Charlie. A girl on the boat told me a lot of lies. (*With sudden energy.*) Absolute lies.

CHARLES: I know, I know. If I'd had a sovereign for every lie that girls on boats have told me, I'd be rich man now. And I'll tell you another thing about women, old boy. Women—and I don't care who they are—all women—can't stand seeing men enjoy themselves *by* themselves. It annoys 'em. It makes 'em furious. They like to think they're indis-indispensable. We've had a good evening, haven't we?

WILFRED: Yes.

CHARLES: All right then. We've had a good evening. No harm in it, no harm in it at all. A few pubs. A few rounds of drinks. A talk with some of the local boys. Social harmony and innocent mirth, as somebody said somewhere. A good evening. But do you think you could get any woman to admit we'd had a good evening? No, old boy. Take it from me. You couldn't. Stella's a nice girl. Would she admit we'd had a good evening? No. Your other sister—Lilian—would she admit it? No. Old boy, they'd turn it down flat. "Where have you been? Look at you."

WILFRED: Well, I don't know. There's a girl I could mention—lives round here—and I don't think she——

CHARLES (*holding up his hand*): She's different. Don't you believe it. They're all different—they don't mind anything—no, not until they've got hold of you. But once they've got you, they won't have this, they won't have that. The thing—the very thing—they told you once they liked you for—that's what they want you to change, old boy. If they liked your little jokes before you were married, then after you're married they ask you why you're always trying to be funny. See what I mean?

WILFRED: Yes, I suppose so. One of our chaps in Africa——

CHARLES: Just a minute. Tell me afterwards. Don't forget. I want to hear about that chap. But what I was going to say was this. It doesn't matter what women do, or who tells you lies, or whether you go to Africa or not, life's a very wonderful thing. Do you realise that, old boy?

WILFRED: By jove—yes. I was just thinking coming along——

CHARLES: A wonderful thing. You can't get away from that.

WILFRED: You can't get away from it, Charlie.

CHARLES: I've had my troubles. Even you've had your troubles——

WILFRED: I should think I have. Do you know when I first went out to Nigeria——

CHARLES: You had a hell of a time. Yes, and I've had a hell of a time. But in spite of everything, I think—I *know*—life's a wonderful thing.

WILFRED: There's *something* about it, isn't there?

CHARLES: You've hit it. There's *something* about it. Here I am—in—where is it?

WILFRED: Where's what?

CHARLES: Here—this place.

WILFRED: Eden End.

CHARLES: Here I am in Eden End. Never been here before—may not ever come here again——

WILFRED: I hope you will, Charlie.

CHARLIE: I hope so, too, old boy. But you never know. That's another thing about life (*very solemnly*)—you never know. A week ago I didn't know I was going to be here—sitting here with you.

WILFRED: And I didn't know you existed.

CHARLES: Didn't you? Dam' shame. But there you are, you see. Here I am. And here you are. Having a drink together. Everything's quiet. Women asleep upstairs—or I hope they are. Your governor out there somewhere—helping some poor devil out of the world—or perhaps helping some other poor devil into the world—and here we are. And you'll go back to Ceylon——

WILFRED: Africa.

CHARLES: It's all the same, old boy. This isn't geography. And I'll go back to town. Get a job. Go on tour again perhaps. People will come to see me. They don't know much about me. I don't know anything about them. Never mind. Perhaps I make 'em cry. Perhaps I make 'em laugh. And, mind you, old boy, give me a part with the ghost of a bit of comedy fat in it, and I *can* make 'em laugh. I can make 'em yell. Weedon Grossmith—Weedon Grossmith, mind you—once said to me: "You've got a touch, Appleby, old boy. You've *got* something." And I have. The trouble is—and this is where *luck* comes in—most of the time I've had to make something out of nothing.

WILFRED: I'll bet you're awfully good, Charlie. Do you know what old Stansted—one of the Company's chief men out there—said about me?

CHARLES: No?

WILFRED: He didn't say it *to* me, but he told one of the other fellows. He said that of all the young men who'd come out lately I'd got the best idea of handling the niggers.

CHARLES: I'm not surprised, old boy. It doesn't surprise me at all.

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That's because you've got sympathy. You're human. You're like me. You've either got it or you haven't got it. We've got it.

WILFRED (*sleepily*): We've got it. I think—you're an awfully fine chap, Charlie. And I'm glad you came to stay with us.

CHARLES: Thanks, old boy. So am I. All the best. (*Drains his glass.*)

WILFRED: All the best. (*Drains his.*)

CHARLES (*getting up*): We'd better be getting upstairs. What was the name of that biggish place at the crossroads?

WILFRED: That's the "White Hart". My favourite.

CHARLES: Quite right. Best of the lot. We'll concentrate on that one next time. Did you notice the little barmaid there, the little fair one?

WILFRED: Yes. That's Alice.

CHARLES: Alice, is it? Well, she's all right. A promising little tart, that. (*Puts his glass back on the table humming or singing "Where My Caravan has Rested".*)

WILFRED (*suddenly rigid with attention*): Why do you call her that?

CHARLES (*carelessly*): Didn't you notice her? Something doing there, old boy. Can't miss it. Quite pretty and absolutely asking for it. Didn't you see her giving me enormous glad eyes? Wanted me to come round and see her when it was quieter.

WILFRED (*suddenly shouting*): She didn't. You're a liar.

CHARLES (*good-humouredly*): Here, steady, steady.

WILFRED (*not so loud now, but with intensity*): I tell you she didn't, and you're a dirty liar.

CHARLES: You're screwed, old boy. Take it easy.

WILFRED (*half shouting, half crying*): Tell me it isn't true.

CHARLES: Anything you like so long as you stop making that row. What the devil does it matter whether it's true or not?

WILFRED: It matters to me.

CHARLES: Oh—I see.

WILFRED: It's the only thing that matters to me.

CHARLES: Don't be a damned fool. Of course it isn't.

WILFRED (*vehemently, clutching hold of the other*): She didn't ask you to come round and see her, did she? Tell me she didn't. (*Raising his voice.*)

CHARLES: Not so much noise, you young ass.

WILFRED: Tell me she didn't, Charles.

CHARLES: She didn't, then. It must have been somebody else—one of the others.

WILFRED (*distressed*): Are you sure?

CHARLES: What I am sure of, old boy, is that you're badly screwed and that it's time I got you up to bed.

LILIAN *in night things and a dressing-gown, stands in the doorway on left, looking at them.*

LILIAN: You're making a frightful noise. (*She comes into room.*)

CHARLES: Sorry—Lilian. Just been having a little argument, that's all. I'm taking Wilfred up to bed now. He's a bit—tired.

LILIAN (*contemptuously*): You mean he's drunk. You both are.

CHARLES (*indignantly*): Oh—no, no, no, no.

STELLA, *also in night things and dressing-gown, appears in open doorway.*

STELLA: What's the matter?

WILFRED (*miserably*): I think—I'm going—to be sick.

CHARLES (*putting arm round him*): That's all right, old boy. That's all right. You stick to me. Steady, steady. (*To STELLA, who comes in and clears the doorway, and LILIAN.*) I'll look after him. (*To WILFRED, who is groaning.*) That's all right, old boy. I've got you. Steady, steady. (*To the GIRLS.*) Don't worry. He's all right.

He escorts him through the doorway. He can be heard, repeating his "All right" and "Steady" outside. STELLA stands near the doorway, watching them. LILIAN stands in the middle of the room, watching STELLA. Finally the latter closes the door, and comes in, looking troubled. LILIAN picks up WILFRED's glass, which is on the floor, and puts it on the table, then picks up his mackintosh, which is sprawling over a chair, and begins to fold it.

LILIAN: Thank God, Dad's still out, that's all.

STELLA: That's what I was thinking.

LILIAN: He hates drunkenness. So do I.

STELLA: He needn't know anything about this.

LILIAN: Don't imagine that I shall tell him. But this has never happened before. Wilfred does go into the local pubs sometimes, but he's never had much to drink. As a matter of fact, I believe he thinks he's fallen in love with a barmaid somewhere. But he's never been like this before.

STELLA: No, this comes of going out with Charles—the very first night too.

LILIAN: And—I hope—the last.

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STELLA: I didn't ask Charles to come here. He's your guest.

LILIAN: He's your husband.

STELLA: He was.

LILIAN: He still is. (*A pause.*) Why did you marry him, Stella?

STELLA: For the usual reasons. I was in love with him. Queer, no doubt—but true. As a matter of fact, I was very much in love with him.

LILIAN: Were you?

STELLA: Poor Charlie! I suppose it does seem incredible to you. I think I'll have one of Dad's biscuits. (*Takes one.*) You have one. (*LILIAN has one.*)

LILIAN: Has he changed very much?

STELLA: No, he hasn't—really. But it's one thing seeing him here, quite out of his element, not working, rather depressed. And it's quite another thing seeing him—as I did for months when we were touring the East and Australia—as the most amusing and charming person in the company. And to be working and travelling and laughing with him month after month, thousands of miles from home. It's no use, Lilian, you can't begin to understand my life. We were very happy for a time. Poor Charlie.

LILIAN: Why do you say "Poor Charlie"?

STELLA: Because—although he doesn't deserve it—I can't help feeling sorry for him. I suppose I'm still fond of him.

LILIAN: Then why don't you look after him?

STELLA: Why should I?

LILIAN: He belongs to you.

STELLA: I can't think about people like that. I'm not possessive. (*Startled.*) What's that?

It is CHARLES, looking in at the door. He is soberer than he was, but still ripe—and very sleepy.

CHARLES: Are you two quarrelling again? You're always quarrelling. Why don't you take it easy? Live and let live.

STELLA (*sharply*): Never mind about us. What about Wilfred?

CHARLES: That's what I came down to say. He's been sick. He's in bed. He's fast asleep.

STELLA: Well, you get to bed now, Charles, and you can both sleep as long as you like in the morning.

CHARLES: It was his own fault, you know. He would mix them. I said to him, right at the first, I said "Now, take my tip, and don't mix 'em." But he wouldn't—

STELLA (*wearily*): Oh—get to bed, Charlie. And don't make a noise. Father may be in any minute.

CHARLES: A noble old fellow. Wouldn't disturb him for the world. Good night, girls. (*Withdraws.*)

STELLA: Poor Charlie. Nobody knows better than I do how maddening he can be, but there's something rather sweet about him. He's only a great child. There are dozens of them—great children, just like him—in the theatre.

LILIAN: Well, if he's a child, all the more reason why you should look after him.

STELLA: Don't nag at me, Lilian.

LILIAN: And child or no child, he can't be allowed to spend any more evenings like this with Wilfred.

STELLA: Well, if Wilfred is developing a passion for barmaids, he's quite capable of getting drunk by himself.

LILIAN: No, he isn't. Wilfred's only a silly baby yet. Besides, it's Dad I'm really thinking about.

STELLA: Yes, there's Dad.

LILIAN: Well?

STELLA: You're just trying to drive me out, aren't you, Lilian? I can't understand you. I don't mean what you're doing—I understand that. But you—yourself. You seem to have no feeling for me at all, less than a stranger would have. It doesn't seem to matter to you that I've been desperately unhappy these last months and that when I came home it was like beginning a wonderful new life. Doesn't that mean anything to you, Lilian?

LILIAN: Yes. And it would mean a lot more if I really believed in it.

STELLA: You think it's all insincere, made-up stuff, an actress letting herself go—don't you?

LILIAN: I think you encourage your emotions, so that whatever they are—in a way—you enjoy them.

STELLA: We shall never agree, of course. We've grown up to be thousands of miles away from each other. We live in different worlds. I think you're rather like mother.

LILIAN: I think I am.

STELLA: But what hurts me is that, underneath all this difference, there isn't, with you, any affection or friendship. If you'd lived so long among strangers, in places where nobody knew or cared about you at all, you'd understand how this can hurt. You've behaved very badly to me—you've deliberately set yourself against me—and yet to me you're still Lilian, my sister, and I'm longing all the time to talk

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properly with you, to remember all the silly old things we did, to laugh and cry together. Can't you see?

LILIAN: The trouble is, Stella, you can afford to feel like that. I can't.

STELLA: What do you mean?

LILIAN: It hasn't been fun for me—treating you like this. It's not true that I don't care at all. I do. But I know—and I knew it the moment you came back—that if I gave in, you'd overwhelm me, sweep me away—

STELLA: And why not?

LILIAN: Because you'd knock down everything I've built up here. You'd take Geoffrey again, without really wanting him. You'd unsettle Dad, Wilfred, everybody and everything. And just when they'd all come to depend on you again, you'd run away—as you did before. People like you, Stella, don't want to make other people unhappy—

STELLA: I don't. Never, never. I know too much about it myself.

LILIAN: But, for all that, you *do* make people unhappy. You can't help it, I suppose. But there's no real responsibility in you.

STELLA (*in despair*): But why are you so responsible—so old and wise? You say I make people unhappy. I may do. I don't know. But I can make them happy too. Can you?

LILIAN: Yes, in my own way.

STELLA: And a dull and dusty way it seems, too.

LILIAN: No it isn't. What do you know about me?

STELLA: How can I know anything about you when you're all shut up inside yourself and won't come out? Oh—it's no use.

LILIAN: We'll never agree.

STELLA: I don't want us to agree. That doesn't matter. But we could at least be *real* together. Even that's impossible, it seems.

LILIAN: It's years too late. Let's be reasonable.

STELLA (*wearily*): Go on, then, let's be reasonable.

LILIAN: You saw what happened to-night? Wilfred—and your Charles. What are you going to do?

STELLA: I don't know. I want to think.

LILIAN: You'll go sooner or later, you know.

STELLA: Why should you say that? You don't know. You don't know what my life's been like. You don't realise what it's meant—coming back—home.

LILIAN: You'll soon get tired of it.

STELLA (*uncertainly*): No. No. I'm sure I shouldn't.

LILIAN (*mercilessly*): Just as you did before. You'd go on smashing things, other people's lives as well as your own. Dad thinks you've had a wonderful time on the stage, that you're going to be a famous actress, that you're happily married—

STELLA (*in distress*): I know. Please, Lilian. I want to think.

LILIAN (*without malice, but forcefully*): If you wanted to stay, you'd have to tell him that you'd failed in everything. And that's only the beginning. You'd never get back into this life properly. You'd be restless. You'd be a person without a real life anywhere. You'd think yourself a failure.

STELLA (*stopping her*): Oh—stop, stop! I won't listen to any more. (*The front door shuts rather noisily.*)

LILIAN: There's Dad coming in.

STELLA: You go to bed, Lilian. I want to talk to him for a minute.

LILIAN: Don't keep him up. He'll be awfully tired.

STELLA (*wearily*): No, no, I know. But I must talk to him. It may be for the last time.

DR. KIRBY *enters. He looks very tired.*

DR. KIRBY: Mrs. Sugden's been delivered of a man-child so big and so like William Sugden that I felt like offering it a pipe of tobacco. Ah, well—I'm tired.

STELLA: You must be, Dad.

LILIAN: Your hot milk and brandy's here.

DR. KIRBY: Thanks. But what are you two doing up?

STELLA: We both heard a noise. It was Charles, and Wilfred. They went to bed but we stayed on, talking.

LILIAN: But I'm going now. Good night.

DR. KIRBY and STELLA: Good night.

LILIAN *goes out. DR. KIRBY pours out the hot milk and puts some brandy in it, sits down and nibbles a biscuit.*

DR. KIRBY: I'm getting a bit tired of the human body, Stella. I shall be glad to get back to my birds. I don't know that the behaviour of birds is much better than that of people. They can be as greedy and quarrelsome and vindictive as we can. But they're not so heavy and lumpy. They do things with more style. There's more enchantment about them. They ought to have had the fairy tales, not us.

STELLA: Perhaps they have their own. Was Mrs.—Sugden—difficult?

DR. KIRBY: Not really. Though it's always a worrying job,

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especially when you've had to wait overtime. But it's done now. And there's another of us arrived in the village.

STELLA: Poor little chap.

DR. KIRBY: Oh—you needn't be sorry for him. To begin with, he looks a fine healthy specimen—the Sugdens are. And then again, with any luck he'll see a better world than you and I will ever know. That's certainly true of me. I'm not one of these elderly men—and I meet enough of 'em—who think everything's going to the dogs. There's a better world coming, Stella—cleaner, saner, happier. We've only to turn a corner—and it's there. I don't suppose I shall turn it, but you will. And this baby of Sugden's won't know anything else. When he grows up—sometime in the Nineteen Thirties—he simply won't understand the muddle we lived in.

STELLA (*sitting at his feet*): It is a muddle, isn't it?

DR. KIRBY (*sipping his drink*): Yes, and it's mostly our own fault. Yet it isn't either. Have you noticed—or are you too young yet—how one part of us doesn't seem to be responsible for our own character and simply suffers because we have that character? You see yourself *being* yourself, behaving in the old familiar way, and though you may pay and suffer, the real you, the one that watches, doesn't seem to be responsible.

STELLA (*eagerly*): Yes, I was thinking about that only to-night. It's true.

DR. KIRBY (*tenderly*): Queer to see you looking like that again, with your hair down. It makes the last twenty years seem like nothing. You might be a child again. (*He puts a hand on her hair, in an awkward caress. She takes his hand and leans her face against his arm.*)

STELLA (*gently*): Dad, I'm afraid Charles and I must go to-morrow.

DR. KIRBY: That's bad news, my dear. I'd hoped you were staying a long time.

STELLA: So had I. But—well—we've just been offered two very good parts.

DR. KIRBY: And you're right to take them. Though I think you could do with a longer holiday than you've had. But if the English Theatre won't even let go of you for a few weeks, we must put up with it, that's all.

STELLA: I don't want to go.

DR. KIRBY: You mustn't mind us. I'm proud of you. I like to think of you forging ahead in your profession, getting all you can out of life. You know, you're doing it for me, as well as for yourself. As I told you before, I think I made a mistake. Your mother wanted me to

settle down here, so I did. Nobody knows but you that I've ever regretted it. That's our secret.

STELLA (*distressed, deeply affectionate, pressing her face against his arm*): Dad!

DR. KIRBY: You're rectifying that mistake, my dear. And only you. Lilian's your mother over again. As long as she's a house of her own—and a man in it—she'll be happy in her own way. Wilfred's a good lad, but he's a bit weak and easy-going. He'll never do much. But you're going on, living as I could have lived. I'm glad. I'm proud. (*Putting a hand gently on her face.*) So there can't be anything to cry about.

STELLA (*jumping up*): Of course not. I'm stupid. And it's bedtime.

DR. KIRBY (*briskly*): Sunday to-morrow. Only one train to London. The Four Twenty. And a brute.

STELLA (*going to door*): That's nothing. We're used to brutal Sunday trains. They're almost the only kind we know. (*Turning at door, trying to smile at him.*) Good night, Dad.

DR. KIRBY: Good night, Stella. (*He finishes his milk and brandy as the curtain falls.*)

SCENE II

Same as before. Sunday afternoon. It is a dark afternoon. The door on the left is open. DR. KIRBY enters, followed closely by SARAH, who is talking volubly and dividing her attention between the window and him. He is trying as best he can to search through the drawers at the table.

SARAH: If you'd a bit o' sense you wouldn't let her stir out to-day, let alone go to London. Sunday an' all. Travelling o' Sunday in a fog. Nowt good'll come of that. It's as thick as ever it wor. Nay, thicker. It'll be worse afore it's better. What they want to run trains at all for o' Sundays, I don't know. Why can't they let folks have a bit o' peace and quiet for one day in the week? (*Taking advantage of her back being turned, DR. KIRBY escapes. SARAH does not notice or turn round.*) Stop at home and sit by the fire. London 'ull still be there to-morrow. It'll keep, London will. Unless it goes rotten. Daft, I call it.

WILFRED *pops his head round the corner.*

WILFRED: I say, Sarah. Who do you think you're talking to?

SARAH: Not to you.

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WILFRED: Well, you're not talking to anybody else, because there's nobody else here.

SARAH: Then I'm wasting my breath.

WILFRED (*entering*): The car'll be here in another quarter of an hour

SARAH: Are they having a motor-car to take 'em to the station?

WILFRED: Yes, old Thompson's Artrol-Johnston.

SARAH: I call it tempting providence.

WILFRED: I can't find my records. Have you seen them?

SARAH: Do you mean the things for that talking machine?

WILFRED: Yes. I can't find them anywhere.

SARAH: I'll go and help Miss Stella to finish her packing. (*Moves towards door.*)

WILFRED: I believe you know where they are.

SARAH: You shall have 'em in the morning.

WILFRED: I thought as much. Check! Where've you put them?

SARAH: Where you won't find them. We don't want no talking machines on a Sunday. You can play it to-morrow all day if you like.

WILFRED (*shouting*): I don't want to play it all day to-morrow. I want those records now.

SARAH: If I gave 'em you, you wouldn't have time to play 'em. (*DR. KIRBY bustles in. He is in a very fussy mood. SARAH darts at him.*) What you're letting Miss Stella go for to-day, Sunday, and wi' this fog and in a motor-car too, I don't know.

DR. KIRBY (*very fussily*): Don't be fussy, Sarah. Don't be fussy. I left a little book somewhere round here this morning. (*Ring at door. DR. KIRBY calls through open door left.*) See who that is, Sarah. (*Almost to himself.*) And I hope to goodness I'm not going to be called away now.

SARAH (*calling off*): It's Captain Farrant.

DR. KIRBY (*calling to her*): All right then, send him in, send him in. (*To WILFRED.*) It's a little book—about that size—called *Moorland Bird Life*. Have you seen it?

WILFRED: No. And Sarah's hidden my gramophone records away somewhere, because it's Sunday. Damned check!

FARRANT *appears in doorway.*

DR. KIRBY: Hello, Geoffrey. Come into the surgery with me, will you? I want to get something for Stella to take away with her.

DR. KIRBY *bustles him out.* WILFRED, *muttering* "Too much fuss," *lights a cigarette.* CHARLES *enters.*

CHARLES: How's the head now?

WILFRED: Getting better, thanks.

CHARLES: You mixed 'em too much, old boy. (*Comes in and looks out of window.*) God!—what a beast of a day. And I don't feel too crisp.

WILFRED (*not without gloomy satisfaction*): You'll have a rotten journey.

CHARLES: I know we shall. You can't tell me anything about long train journeys on foggy Sundays. If we'd any sense, we'd stay here and sit in front of the fire and talk about West Africa and wild birds and operations and Gaby Deslys and the Bunny-Hug.

WILFRED: Can you do the Bunny-Hug?

CHARLES: No. Nor the Turkey Trot. Nor the Tango. Not my line—thank God! At the moment, I feel that my line is playing old family solicitors, rheumatically, toothless old scoundrels. (*Imitates one.*) "I have been instructed, Sir Rupert, to acquaint you with the te-r-r-rms of your uncle's will."

WILFRED (*laughs*): Jolly fine, I wish I was an actor.

CHARLES (*gloomily*): And I wish I was in West Africa—the hottest and blackest bit. (*Coming closer, and lowering voice.*) By the way, just let me give you a tip, while I've a chance, old boy. Take it or leave it. But I think, if I were you, I should give that pub—you know the one—the "White Hart"—a miss, and give the little girl Alice a miss with it. I don't want to interfere, old boy—and couldn't preach if I tried. But they're no good, those bits. Not to a youngster like you. She'll only lead you up and down the garden. I know. I've had some in my time. Give it a miss, old boy.

WILFRED (*sullen*): Yes—but you don't understand——

CHARLES: Absolutely understand everything. I've been there. I've had some. Just think it over, old boy.

WILFRED (*wearily*): The trouble is—— I'm having a hell of a time.

CHARLES (*patting him on the shoulder*): It'll pass. I know. Try and find another little girl. There must be plenty round here. Squires' daughters with round red cheeks who'll sing the Indian Love Lyrics to you after dinner. (*Sings, in burlesque manner.*) "Ler-hess than the der-hust, Be-neath thy chariot whee-heel".

STELLA *enters, dressed as in ACT I. She carries a small case which she puts on the table.*

STELLA: Oh, Wilfred, Lilian wants you.

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WILFRED (*gloomily*): All right. (*Goes off.*)

CHARLES: Haven't you finished packing yet, old girl?

STELLA: Very nearly. All but some needlework and a couple of books. Charles, I want to talk to you.

CHARLES: And I want to talk to you. Haven't had a chance yet to-day. Look here, what's happening? I get up——

STELLA: At lunch time.

CHARLES: Admitted. And not feeling very bright. And I find we're leaving this afternoon. I gather, from what your father said, that we're supposed to have just been offered two wonderful parts.

STELLA (*hastily*): That's what I told him. I hope you didn't——

CHARLES: Now, now. You know me better than that. I murmured something about Tree and His Majesty's Theatre—big new production. Nearly convinced myself.

STELLA (*relieved*): That's all right, then.

CHARLES: Yes, as far as it goes. But I want to know what's happening.

STELLA (*smiling faintly*): Well, we're both getting on the same train for town and sitting in the same compartment. Once we're out of sight, if you don't want to talk to me, you needn't, Charles.

CHARLES: I see. We're putting on a performance for these people here.

STELLA: Yes. It's probably the only performance we shall put on for some time, so we'd better make the best of it.

CHARLES: Look here, Stella, couldn't we go on with it when we get to town?

STELLA: Do you want to?

CHARLES: I do. You ought to know that. But do you, that's the point?

STELLA (*gravely*): I think I'd like to try again, Charles.

CHARLES (*happily*): That's wonderful of you, it really is, old girl.

STELLA (*half laughing, but sharp*): And you mustn't call me "old girl".

CHARLES: Sorry, I forgot.

STELLA: How much money have you?

CHARLES (*humorously*): Now I know we *have* joined up again. Quite like old times. Yes, I've some money. About seventeen pounds. And then there's a fellow at the club who owes me a tenner——

STELLA: I haven't forgotten him. He still doesn't count. You

haven't much, have you? And I've only about twenty left. We shall have to get a job quick, Charles.

CHARLES: We'll walk into one to-morrow, now that we're together again. Might pick up a couple of leads for the road. What about trying for one of God's own countries again, eh?

STELLA: Yes, I wouldn't mind. In fact, I'd like it. If I'm going away, I might as well go a long way.

CHARLES: You're right, y'know, to clear out. You'd never settle here. All right for a break, but that's all. You're doing the right thing.

STELLA (*indulgently*): And am I doing the right thing—taking you back again?

CHARLES: It's a risk, I know—I'm no catch—but I won't let you down. We've had some fun together. We'll have some more yet. What do you say?

STELLA (*after a pause*): You've got the wrong tie on. Why do you keep wearing that tie?

CHARLES: It's the only one I brought. What's the matter with it?

STELLA: It's awful.

FARRANT *opens the door*.

FARRANT: Oh—sorry.

CHARLES: That's all right. Come in, old boy. We're just having a chat about ties.

FARRANT *comes in*.

STELLA: We haven't long now. (*To CHARLES*.) Will you and Wilfred get my trunk down?

CHARLES: All baggage will be stacked in the hall—immediately. (*Goes out, whistling*.)

STELLA: Well—Geoffrey?

FARRANT: You're going.

STELLA: Very soon. Back to town.

FARRANT: I'm going too.

STELLA: You're going? Where? When?

FARRANT: I'm going out to New Zealand for a year or two, perhaps longer. To my cousin.

STELLA: But, Geoffrey, you were saying, only the other day, that you were so fond of this place you couldn't bear to leave it.

FARRANT: So I thought. Then I found I was wrong. I wanted to get away.

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STELLA: And you've really made your mind up?

FARRANT: Yes. I cabled my cousin yesterday. I shall take the next boat.

STELLA (*involuntarily*): Poor Lilian!

FARRANT: Why do you say that?

STELLA: Don't you realise that Lilian's in love with you, and has been for years?

FARRANT (*embarrassed*): Awful question to ask a chap!

STELLA: Well, she is, you know.

FARRANT (*embarrassed*): I'm sorry. Matter of fact, I'm very fond of Lilian. She's a fine girl. We've seen a lot of one another.

STELLA (*softly*): Then why don't you marry her, Geoffrey?

FARRANT: Because I don't want to, Stella. And I don't understand why you should ask me to. I don't understand women, at all, I'm afraid. I can't make you out—for instance.

STELLA: Then don't try.

FARRANT: I was angry with you when I left the other afternoon.

STELLA: I know you were, my dear. I'm sorry.

FARRANT: In a way, I'm still angry. But it's no use.

STELLA: It isn't any use being angry with people—like that. I'm beginning to see that.

FARRANT: I don't mean that—quite. I mean—well, here I am, you see. And I didn't know you were going when I called. I just couldn't keep away.

STELLA: But you were determined to go yourself—and a long way, too?

FARRANT: That was your doing, of course. I knew you'd be leaving us soon, and I felt you'd just leave me and the whole place as flat as a pancake. I couldn't stand the thought of that. I had to do something.

STELLA (*distressed*): I'm sorry. It's all such a muddle, Geoffrey, and I seem to be muddle-maker in chief. For years, while I stayed away, I had the thought of this place—home—always in my mind, and here, I felt, it was different—no muddle. For an hour—no, only for half an hour—it was all I had thought it was, and I was so happy. Then I found it was all mixed up with the rest of the world. And now I haven't even got this to think about.

FARRANT: You talk too much about happiness, Stella.

STELLA (*with a faint smile*): I think I do, Geoffrey. I must be a braver traveller. We have our lives to get on with, to live them as best we can. There's no running away. No escape. No miracles.

There is a burst of talking, off, as if the kitchen door had been opened.

CHARLES (*off*): I'll carry the tray.

FARRANT: I think the others are coming. Good-bye, Stella.

STELLA (*quickly*): But you're coming to the station?

FARRANT (*very quietly*): Yes, but this is the real good-bye. And good luck. I—well—I shall always love you.

STELLA: It's more than I deserve. Good-bye, my dear.

She kisses him, lightly, quickly. SARAH enters, followed by CHARLES carrying a tray on which are cups of tea. A car can be heard hooting outside. DR. KIRBY and LILIAN follow CHARLES.

WILFRED arrives a moment later. They are all wearing or carrying overcoats, etc., and are ready for the journey.

CHARLES: Enter ye butler!

SARAH: I don't care if all the motor-cars in England is blowing and puffing and tooting outside, you're all going to have a good hot cup o' tea afore you go.

STELLA: Of course we are. Lovely tea. Thank you, Sarah.

WILFRED (*entering*): The car's here. You haven't much time. (*The tray is on the table and they are now grouped round it.*)

SARAH (*going off right, grumbling*): Plenty o' time. Let the thing wait.

CHARLES (*trying tea, in low voice*): Strong stuff, isn't it?

DR. KIRBY (*also in low voice*): Far too strong. But she's made it specially. Must try and drink some just to please her.

CHARLES: Rather.

STELLA: Of course. (*In loud ringing tone.*) Lovely tea.

FARRANT: Hello, Lilian!

LILIAN (*smiling charmingly*): Hello, Geoffrey. Isn't it a horrible day?

FARRANT: Beastly.

LILIAN: How's the roan?

FARRANT: Better than I thought. The vet says it's a sprain. (*Moves away negligently.*)

Enter SARAH from right, carrying small parcel.

SARAH: I'd nearly forgotten this, Miss Stella.

STELLA: What is it, darling?

SARAH: Why, your fancy dress I found the other day—very day you came home.

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WILFRED: She doesn't want it, Sarah.

STELLA: Of course, I do. I shall hang it up in my dressing-room—always, wherever I am. A lovely present, Sarah. And the tea's so good.

CHARLES: Extraordinary.

DR. KIRBY: Now, Sarah, you must stop in, y'know. No station for you.

STELLA: Good gracious, no! Much too cold and foggy for you. Besides I can say good-bye to you much better here.

SARAH: All right, then. Won't you have a drop more tea, love?

STELLA: No, thank you, darling.

WILFRED: Time we were off.

There is a vague stir but no definite move towards the door.

CHARLES (*idly*): If that telephone rings when we've gone, I'll bet it's to offer me the biggest part I've ever known—and I'll miss it.

WILFRED: More likely to ask me to go shooting rabbits with the Mowbrays.

DR. KIRBY (*heartily*): Don't you worry. I'll be the person who'll be wanted. And I've a good idea who'll be wanting me—poor soul. Well, all ready?

They straggle out, first WILFRED and DR. KIRBY, then LILIAN and FARRANT.

CHARLES (*with STELLA's parcel*): Now, Sarah, old girl, you stay here and keep warm. And I'm delighted to have met you. Heard a lot about you from Stella, y'know. Good-bye. (*Holds out his hand.*)

SARAH: Good-bye. (*Shaking hands timidly.*) And—look after her.

CHARLES (*with mock salute of sword*): With my life! Good-bye. (*He goes out.*)

SARAH: He's not a bad sort for an actor chap, though I'll bet he takes a bit o' watching. But you look after him, too, love. He's nowt but a big daft lad—like 'em all.

STELLA (*whispering*): Oh, Sarah. I don't know what to say. There aren't any words.

SARAH: Nay, love. Nay, little love. (*Fondling her face.*) And don't catch cold when you're coming out o' the theatres. (*Very softly.*) I'm an old woman now, a'most past my time. Happen I shan't see you again.

STELLA (*crying*): Yes, you will. You must.

SARAH: Oh, I'll see you sometime. There's a better place than this, love.

Noise of motor engine starting up outside.

CHARLES (*off, calling*): Come on, Stella.

STELLA (*breaking loose*): I must go. Good-bye, Sarah, darling.
(*She takes a last look round.*) Good-bye—everything.

She hurriedly kisses SARAH, then runs out blindly. The door bangs to behind her. Then the outer door is heard closing with a bang. Noise of car going away. SARAH goes to the window, stares out for a moment, then closes the curtains, so that there is no light but that from the fire. She goes over to the fire and lights a taper. The telephone bell begins ringing. SARAH goes to the telephone with the lighted taper in her hand, holds the light close to it for a second, staring at it in bewilderment, then slowly withdraws into her own room. The telephone ringing is fainter, the firelight fades, until at last there is silence and there is darkness, and we find that the curtain has fallen and the play has ended.

END OF ACT THREE

TIME AND THE CONWAYS

A Play in Three Acts

For IRENE and IVOR BROWN with
affection

ACT I

That Night. Kay's Twenty-first Birthday

ACT II

Another Night. And Another Birthday

ACT III

That Night Again. Her Twenty-first Birthday

ACT III is continuous with ACT I

The scene throughout is a sitting-room in Mrs. CONWAY's house, a detached villa in a prosperous suburb of a manufacturing town, Newlingham. ACTS I and III take place on an autumn night in 1919. ACT II on an autumn night at the present time. (1937)

THE PEOPLE

CONWAYS

MRS. CONWAY

ALAN

MADGE

ROBIN

HAZEL

KAY

CAROL

OTHERS

JOAN HELFORD

ERNEST BEEVERS

GERALD THORNTON

Time and The Conways—Copyright, 1937, 1939, by J. B. Priestley.

"Time and the Conways" was first produced in London on August 26th, 1937, at the Duchess Theatre, with the following cast:

HAZEL	ROSEMARY SCOTT
CAROL	EILEEN ERSKINE
ALAN	RAYMOND HUNTLEY
MADGE	MOLLY RANKIN
KAY	JEAN FORBES-ROBERTSON
MRS. CONWAY	BARBARA EVEREST
JOAN HELFORD	HELEN HORSEY
GERALD THORNTON	WILFRED BABBAGE
ERNEST BEEVERS	MERVYN JOHNS
ROBIN	ALEXANDER ARCHDALE

The Play produced by IRENE HENTSCHEL

ACT I

There is a party at the Conways, this autumn evening of 1919, but we cannot see it, only hear it. All we can see at first is the light from the hall coming through the curtained archway on the right of the room, and a little red firelight on the other side. But we can hear young voices chattering and laughing and singing, the sharp little explosion of a cracker or two, and a piano playing popular music of that period. After a moment or two, a number of voices begin to sing the tune we hear on the piano. It is all very jolly indeed.

Then we hear a girl's voice (it is HAZEL CONWAY'S) calling, loud and clear: "Mother, where shall we put them?" The voice that replies, further off, can only be MRS. CONWAY'S, and she says: "In the back room. Then we'll act out here." To this, HAZEL, who is obviously very excited, screams: "Yes, marvellous!" and then calls to somebody still further away, probably upstairs: "CAROL—in the back room."

And now HAZEL dashes in, switching on the light. We see at once that she is a tall, golden young creature, dressed in her very best for this party. She is carrying an armful of old clothes, hats, and odds and ends, all the things that happy people used to dress up in for charades. The room looks very cosy, although it has no doorway, only the large curtained archway on the right. At the back is a window with a step up to it, and a cushioned seat. The curtains are drawn. On the left is a fireplace or an anthracite stove, glowing red. There are several small bookcases against or in the walls, some pieces of fairly good furniture, including a round table and a small bureau, and some passable pictures. It is obviously one of those nondescript rooms, used by the family far more than the drawing-room is, and variously called the Back Room, the Morning Room, the School-room, the Nursery, the Blue, Brown or Red Room. This might easily have been called the Red Room, for in this light it seems to range from pink to plum colour, and it makes a fine cosy setting for the girls in their party dress.

Another one has arrived, while HAZEL is dumping her charade things on a round settee in the middle of the room. This is CAROL, the youngest of the Conways—perhaps sixteen—and now terrifically excited, breathless, and almost tottering beneath a load of charade stuff, including a cigar-box gloriously filled with old false whiskers and noses, spectacles, and what not. With all the reckless haste of a

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child she bangs down all this stuff, and starts to talk, although she has no breath left. And now—after adding that CAROL is an enchanting young person—we can leave them to explain themselves.

CAROL (*gasping but triumphant*): I've found—the box—with all the false whiskers and things in——

HAZEL (*triumphantly*): I knew it hadn't been thrown away.

CAROL: Nobody'd dare to throw it away. (*Holds it out, with lid open.*) Look! (*HAZEL makes a grab at it.*) Don't snatch!

HAZEL (*not angrily*): Well, I must look, mustn't I, idiot? (*They both, like children, eagerly explore the contents of the box.*) Bags I this one. (*She fishes out a large drooping moustache.*) Oo—and this! (*Fishes out very bulbous false nose.*)

CAROL (*an unselfish creature*): All right, but don't take *all* the good ones, Hazel. Kay and Madge will want some. I think Kay ought to have *first* choice. After all, it's *her* birthday—and you know how she adores charades. Mother won't want any of these because she'd rather look grand, wouldn't she? Spanish or Russian or something. What are you doing?

HAZEL *has turned aside to fasten on the nose and moustache, and now has managed it, though they are not very secure. She now turns round.*

HAZEL (*in deep voice*): Good morning, good morning.

CAROL (*with a scream of delight*): Mr. Pennyman! You know, Hazel, at the paper shop? The one who hates Lloyd George and wags his head very slowly all the time he tells you Lloyd George is no good. Do Mr. Pennyman, Hazel. Go on.

HAZEL (*in her ordinary voice, incongruous*): I couldn't, Carol. I've only seen him about twice. I never go to the paper shop.

ALAN *looks in, grinning when he sees HAZEL. He is a shy, quiet, young man, in his earlier twenties, who can have a slight stammer. He is dressed, rather carelessly, in ordinary clothes. CAROL turns and sees him.*

CAROL: Alan, come in, and don't let the others see. (*As he does.*) Isn't she *exactly* like Mr. Pennyman at the paper shop, the one who hates Lloyd George?

ALAN (*grinning shyly*): She is—a bit.

HAZEL (*in a fantastic deep voice*): "I hate Lloyd George."

ALAN: No, he doesn't talk like that, Hazel.

CAROL: Not the least little bit. He says (*with a rather good imitation of a thick, semi-educated man's voice*): "I'll tell you what it is—Mish

Conway—that there Lloyd George—they're going to be shorry they ever put 'im where they did—shee?"

ALAN (*grinning*): Yes, that's him. Very good, Carol.

CAROL (*excitedly*): I think I ought to be an actress. They said at school I was the best Shylock they'd ever had.

HAZEL (*taking off the nose and moustache*): You can have these if you like, Carol.

CAROL (*taking them*): Are you sure you don't want them? I don't think you ought to dress up as a silly man because you're so pretty. Perhaps I could wear these and do Mr. Pennyman. Couldn't we bring him into the third syllable somehow? Instead of a general. I think we've had enough generals.

ALAN: We have. Ask Kay to work in Mr. Pennyman instead.

HAZEL: Kay ought to be here now, planning everything.

ALAN: She's coming in. Mother told me to tell you not to make too much of a mess in here.

CAROL: You *must* have a mess with charades. It's part of it.

HAZEL: And just wait till mother starts dressing up. She makes more mess than anybody. (*To ALAN.*) I hope some of the old ones are going now. Are they?

ALAN: Yes.

HAZEL: It's much more fun without them. And mother daren't let herself go while they're still here. Tell Kay and Madge to come in, Alan.

ALAN: Right.

Goes out. The two girls begin turning the clothes over. HAZEL picks out some old-fashioned women's things and holds them up or against herself.

HAZEL: Look at these! Could you believe people *ever* wore such ridiculous things?

CAROL: I can just remember mother in that, can't you?

HAZEL: Of course I can, infant!

CAROL (*more soberly, looking at man's old-fashioned shooting or Norfolk coat*): That was Daddy's, wasn't it?

HAZEL: Yes. I believe he wore it—that very holiday.

CAROL: Perhaps we ought to put it away.

HAZEL: I don't think mother would mind—now.

CAROL: Yes she would. And I know I would. I don't want anybody to dress up and be funny in the coat father wore just before

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he was drowned. (*She has now folded the coat, and puts it on the window-seat. Then, as she returns.*) I wonder if it's very horrible being drowned.

HAZEL (*impatiently*): Oh, don't start that all over again, Carol. Don't you remember how you used to go on asking that—until mother was furious?

CAROL: Yes—but I was only a kid then.

HAZEL: Well, now that you think you aren't a kid any longer, just stop it.

CAROL: It was the coat that made me remember. You see, Hazel, to be talking and laughing and all jolly, just the same as usual—and then, only half an hour afterwards—to be drowned—it's so horrible. It seemed awfully quick to us—but perhaps to him, there in the water, it may have seemed to take ages—

HAZEL: Oh, stop it, Carol. Just when we're having some fun. Why do you?

CAROL: I don't know. But don't you often feel like that? Just when everything is very jolly and exciting, I suddenly think of something awfully serious, sometimes horrible—like Dad drowning—or that little mad boy I once saw with the *huge head*—or that old man who walks in the Park with that great lump growing out of his face—

HAZEL (*stopping her ears*): No, I'm not listening. I'm not listening.

CAROL: They pop up right in the middle of the jolly stuff, you know, Hazel. It happens to Kay, too. So it must be in the family—a bit.

Enter MADGE. She is a year or two older than HAZEL, not so pretty, and a far more serious and responsible person. She has been to Girton, and already done a little teaching, and you feel all this in her brisk, decided, self-confident manner. She is, too, an earnest enthusiast.

MADGE: You found them? Good. (*Looks over the things.*) I didn't think we'd have so many old things left. Mother ought to have given them away.

HAZEL: I'm glad she didn't. Besides, who'd have had them?

MADGE: Lots of people would have been glad of them. You never realise, Hazel, how wretchedly poor most people are. It just doesn't occur to you, does it?

HAZEL (*not crossly*): Don't be schoolmistressy, Madge.

CAROL (*who is trying things on, turning to point at MADGE impishly*): Has Gerald Thornton arrived?

MADGE: As a matter of fact, he has—a few minutes ago.

CAROL (*triumphantly*): I knew it. I could see it in your eye, Madge.

MADGE: Don't be absurd. He's brought another man with him, a new client of his, who's desperately anxious to know this family.

HAZEL: So he ought to be. Nice?

MADGE: Oh—a funny little man.

CAROL (*dancing about*): That's just what we want—a funny little man. Perfect for charades.

MADGE: No, not that kind. In fact, he probably hasn't any sense of humour. Very shy, so far, and terrified of mother. Very much the little business man, I should think.

CAROL: Is he a profiteer—like the ones in *Punch*?

MADGE: He looks as if he might be, some day. His name's Ernest Beevers.

HAZEL (*giggling*): What a silly name! I'm sorry for his wife, if he has one.

MADGE: I gather he hasn't. Look here, we ought to be starting. (*Enter KAY, whose twenty-first birthday party this is. An intelligent, sensitive girl, who need not be as pretty as HAZEL. She has a sheet of paper.*) Kay, we ought to be starting.

KAY: I know. The others are coming. (*Begins rooting among the things.*) Some good costumes here, ladies. Oo—look! (*She has fished out some absurd old-fashioned woman's cape, cloak or coat, and hat, and throws them on ridiculously, then stands apart and strikes absurd melodramatic attitude and speaks in false stilted tone.*) One moment, Lord What's-your-name. If I am discovered here, who will believe that my purpose in coming here to-night—visiting your—er—rooms—er unaccompanied—was solely to obtain the—er papers—that will enable me to clear—er—my husband's name, the name of a man who—er—has asked nothing better than the—er privilege of serving his country—and ours too, Lord Thingumtibob—one who—that is—to whom— (*In ordinary tone.*) No, I'm getting all tied up. You know, we ought to have had a scene like that, all grand and dramatic and full of papers.

MADGE: Well, what *are* we to have?

HAZEL (*coolly*): I've forgotten the word.

CAROL (*indignantly*): Hazel, you're the *limit*! And we spent hours working it out!

HAZEL: I didn't. Only you and Kay, just because you fancy yourselves as budding authoresses and actresses.

KAY (*severely*): The word—idiot!—is *Pussyfoot*. Puss. See. Foot. Then the whole word.

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MADGE: I think four scenes are too many. And they'll easily guess it.

KAY: That doesn't matter. It makes them happy if they guess it.

CAROL (*rather solemnly*): The great thing is—to *dress up*.

Enter MRS. CONWAY. She is a charming woman in her middle forties, very nicely dressed, with an easy, vivacious manner.

MRS. C.: Now I'm ready—if you are. What a mess you're making. I knew you would. Let me see. (*Dives into the clothes, and scatters them far more wildly than the others have done. She finally fishes out a Spanish shawl and mantilla.*) Ah—here they are. Now I shall be a Spanish beauty. I know a song for it, too. (*Begins putting the Spanish things on.*)

HAZEL (*to KAY*): What did I tell you?

MRS. C. (*who is specially fond of HAZEL*): What did you tell her, darling?

HAZEL: I told Kay, whatever she arranged, you'd insist on doing your Spanish turn.

MRS. C.: Well, why not?

KAY: It doesn't come into the scenes I'd thought of, that's all.

MRS. C. (*busy with her costume*): Oh—you can easily arrange that, dear—you're so clever. I've just been telling Dr. Halliday and his niece how clever you are. They seemed surprised, I can't imagine why.

HAZEL: It's the first time I've seen Monica Halliday out of her land girl costume. I'm surprised she didn't turn up to-night in her trousers and leggings.

KAY: She looks quite queer out of them, doesn't she? Rather like a female impersonator.

MADGE: Oh, come on, Kay. What do we do?

KAY: The first scene, *Puss*, is an old lady who's lost her cat. She's really a kind of witch.

CAROL (*happily*): I'm to be the old lady.

CAROL begins finding suitable clothes—an old shawl, etc.—and some white hair—for the old lady. And during following dialogue, converts herself into a very creditable imitation.

KAY: Mother, you and Hazel are her two daughters who are visiting her—

HAZEL: I know my bit. I keep saying "I always hated that terrible cat of yours, Mother." What can I wear? (*Pokes about.*)

MRS. C. (*now Spanish*): Well, that's all right, dear. I'll be the Spanish daughter, you see.

KAY (*resignedly*): She didn't have a Spanish daughter, but I suppose it doesn't matter.

MRS. C.: Not in the least. Nobody cares. And then I think I'd better not appear in the others, because I suppose you'll be wanting me to sing afterwards.

KAY: Of course. But I'd put you down for two more. Madge and Joan Helford will have to do those.

MRS. C.: What a pity Robin isn't here! You know, Madge, he wrote and said he might be demobbed any day now, and it seems such a shame just to miss Kay's party. Robin loves parties. He's like me. Your father never cared for them much. Suddenly, right in the middle, just when everything was getting along, he'd want to be quiet—and take me into a corner and ask me how much longer people were staying—just when they were beginning to enjoy themselves. I never could understand that.

KAY: I can. I've often felt like that.

MRS. C.: But why, dear, why? It isn't sensible. If you're having a party, you're having a party.

KAY (*earnestly*): Yes, it isn't that. And it isn't that you suddenly dislike the people. But you feel—at least I do, and I suppose that's what father felt too—you feel, quite suddenly, that it isn't *real* enough—and you want something to be *real*. Do you see, Mother?

MRS. C.: No I don't, my dear. It sounds a little morbid to me. But your father could be quite morbid sometimes—you mightn't think so, but he could—and I suppose you take after him.

KAY (*very gravely*): Do you think that sometimes, in a mysterious sort of way, he *knew*?

MRS. C. (*not too attentive to this*): Knew *what*, dear? Look at Hazel, doesn't she look rather sweet? I can remember where I first wore those things. Absurd! Knew *what*?

KAY: Knew what was going to happen to him. You know, Alan said that some of the men he knew who were killed in the trenches seemed to know sometimes that they were going to be killed, as if a kind of shadow fell over them. Just as if—now and then—we could see round the corner—into the future.

MRS. C. (*easily*): You have the most extraordinary ideas. You must try and put some of them into your book. Are you happy, darling?

KAY: Yes, Mother. Very happy.

MRS. C.: That's all right then. I want you to have a lovely birthday. I feel we all can be happy again, now that the horrible war's all over and people are sensible again, and Robin and Alan are quite safe. I forgot to ask—did Robin send you anything, Kay?

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KAY: No. I didn't expect him to.

MRS. C.: Oh—but that isn't like Robin, you know, Kay. He's a most generous boy, much too generous really. Now that may mean he thinks he's coming home very soon.

Enter ALAN with JOAN HELFORD, who is HAZEL's friend and the same age, pretty and rather foolish.

KAY: Alan, tell them we're beginning—and it's three syllables.

ALAN goes.

JOAN: I think you all look marvellous. I'm rotten at this, you know, Kay. Don't say I didn't warn you.

KAY: Now then, Carol, you start. And remember, only say "Puss" once. Don't you two say it—only Carol. (ALAN returns. CAROL goes out—and there can be the sound of distant laughing and clapping.) Good old Carol. Now then—you two. (Almost pushes them off.) Now the next syllable is S.Y. So I thought it wouldn't be cheating too badly if we called that "sy". Y'know, Cockney—"I sy, Bert." So this is an East End scene. Madge, you're the old mother.

MADGE (who has started putting on very droll shabby clothes): Yes, I remembered.

ALAN: What am I? I forget.

KAY: You're Bert. Just put something silly on. Is there anything here you can wear, Joan?

During following dialogue, they all dress up.

JOAN: I was in London last week, staying with my uncle, and we went to the theatre three times. We saw *Tilly of Bloomsbury* and *Cinderella Man* and *Kissing Time*. I liked *Cinderella Man* best—Owen Nares, y'know. I thought Robin was coming home soon.

KAY: He is.

JOAN: He's an officer, isn't he? You weren't an officer, were you, Alan?

ALAN: No, I was a lance-corporal. One stripe, y'know. Nothing at all.

JOAN: Didn't you want to be anything better than that?

ALAN: No.

KAY: Alan has no ambition at all. Have you, my pet?

ALAN (simply): Not much.

JOAN: If I were a man, I'd want to be very important. What are you doing now, Alan? Somebody said you were at the Town Hall.

ALAN: I am. In the Rate Office. Just a clerk, y'know.

JOAN: Isn't it dull?

ALAN: Yes.

KAY: Alan never minds being dull. I believe he has tremendous long adventures inside his head that nobody knows anything about.

JOAN: Hazel says you've started to write another novel, Kay. Have you?

KAY (*rather curtly*): Yes.

JOAN: I don't know how you can—I mean, I think I'd be all right once I'd started properly—but I can't see how you start. What did you do with the last one?

KAY: Burnt it.

JOAN: Why?

KAY: It was putrid.

JOAN: But wasn't that an awful waste of time?

KAY: Yes, I suppose so.

ALAN: Still, look at the time you and I waste, Joan.

JOAN: Oh—no—I'm always doing *something*. Even though I haven't to go to the canteen any more, I'm always busy. (MADGE, *who has withdrawn herself a little, now laughs.*) Why do you laugh, Madge?

MADGE: Can't a girl laugh?

JOAN (*humbly*): You always did laugh at me, Madge. I suppose because I'm not clever, like you.

HAZEL *returns, letting in noise—laughing and clapping—from outside.*

HAZEL: Well, you can imagine what happened. Mother let herself go, and of course it became all Spanish. I don't believe they'll ever remember hearing "puss" mentioned. What are you supposed to be, Joan?

JOAN (*hopefully*): A sort of Coster girl.

HAZEL: You look a sort of general mess. Oh—(*to KAY*) Carol wants to do Mr. Pennyman at the paper shop instead of a general for the third syllable.

KAY: How can she? If it's soldiers drilling, you can't have Mr. Pennyman. Unless we make him another soldier—and get Gerald Thorton or somebody to be a general.

CAROL *returns, very hot and flushed, and begins taking off her old woman's disguise.*

CAROL: Mother's still on. Golly!—it's baking being an old witch.

KAY: Do you insist on being Mr. Pennyman in the third syllable?

CAROL (*brightening up*): Oo—I'd forgotten that. Yes, please let me do Mr. Pennyman, Kay—my lamb, my love, my precious—

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KAY: All right. But he'll have to be a soldier. Just joined up, you see.

Enter MRS. C. very grand, flushed, triumphant. She is carrying a glass of claret cup.

MRS. C.: Well—really—that was *very* silly—but they seemed to enjoy it, and that's the great thing. I thought you were very good, Carol. (*To KAY.*) Carol was sweet, Kay. Now don't ask me to do any more of this, because really I mustn't, especially if you want me to sing afterwards. So leave me out, Kay. (*Begins to sip cup.*)

KAY: All right. Now come on. (*Begins shepherding her players, MADGE, ALAN, JOAN.*)

JOAN: Honestly, Kay, I'll be *awful*.

KAY: It doesn't matter. You've nothing to do. Now then—Madge.

MADGE (*loudly, in laborious imitation of Cockney mother*): Nah then, Bert. End yew, Dy-sy. Cem along or we'll be lite. (*Leads the way off, followed by other three.*)

HAZEL: How on earth did you get that claret cup, Mother?

MRS. C. (*complacently*): Got Gerald Thornton to hand it to me—and it rounded off my little scene nicely. I don't want any more. Would you like it?

HAZEL *takes it, and sips while removing things. They are all removing things.*

CAROL: Mother, you weren't going to be an *actress*, were you—just a singer?

MRS. C.: I don't know what you mean by *just* a singer. I was a singer certainly. But I did some acting too. When the Newlingham Amateur Operatic first did *Merrie England*, I played Bess. And I'd had all you children then. *You* were only about two, Carol.

HAZEL: Mother, Joan *did* stay in London last week, and she went to three theatres.

MRS. C.: She has relatives there, and we haven't. That makes a great difference.

HAZEL: Aren't we *ever* going?

MRS. C.: Yes, of course. Perhaps Robin will take us—I mean, just you and me—when he comes back.

CAROL (*solemnly*): It says in the paper this morning that We Must All Get On With Our Jobs. This Mere Rush For Amusement has gone on long enough now. There's Work Waiting To Be Done.

HAZEL (*indignantly*): A fat lot of rushing for amusement we've done, haven't we? I think that's frightfully unfair and idiotic. Just

when we *might* have some fun, after washing up in canteens and hospitals and queueing for foul food, with *nobody* about at all, they go and say we've had enough amusement and must get on with our jobs. What jobs?

CAROL: Rebuilding a shattered world. It said that too.

MRS. C. (*half lightly, half not, to HAZEL*): Your job will be to find a very nice young man and marry him. And *that* oughtn't to be difficult—for you.

CAROL (*now getting into trousers to play Mr. Pennyman*): Hurry up, Hazel, and then I can be a bridesmaid. I believe you're my *only* chance. Kay says she won't get married for *ages*, if ever, because her Writing—Her Work—must come first.

MRS. C.: That's nonsense, my dear. When the proper young man comes along, she'll forget about her writing.

CAROL: I don't believe she will, Mother. And anyhow, she won't have bridesmaids. And if Madge ever marries, I know it will be to some kind of Socialist in a tweed suit, who'll insist on being married in a Register Office—

HAZEL: I'm not so sure about that. I've had my eye on Madge lately.

CAROL (*now as Mr. Pennyman*): And I've 'ad my eye on Lloyd George. An' what for, Mish Conway? Bee-corsh yew can't trusht that little Welshman. Yew watch 'im, that'sh all I shay—

MRS. C.: That's *very* good, dear. You're rather like Mr. Worsnop—do you remember him—the cashier at the works? Every New Year's Eve, your father used to bring Mr. Worsnop here, after they'd done all the books at the office, and used to give him some port. And when I went in, Mr. Worsnop always stood and held his glass like this (*she holds glass close to herself in a rather cringing attitude*) and say "My respects, Mrs. Conway, my deepest respects." And I always wanted to laugh. He's retired now, and gone to live in South Devon.

After slight pause, MADGE, still in absurd old Costerwoman disguise, enters with GERALD THORNTON. He is in his early thirties, a solicitor and son of a solicitor, and is fairly tall and good-looking, and carefully dressed. He has a pleasant, man-of-the-world air, very consciously cultivated. MADGE is arguing hotly, with all the fiery slapdash of enthusiastic youth.

MADGE: But what the miners want and ask for is simply nationalisation. They say, if coal is as important as you say it is, then the mines shouldn't be in the hands of private owners any longer. Nationalise them, they say. That's the fairest thing.

GERALD: All right. But supposing we don't want them nationalised.

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What then? Some of us have seen enough of Government mis-management already.

MRS. C.: Quite so, Gerald. Everybody knows how ridiculous they were. Sending bags of sand to Egypt!

MADGE (*hotly*): I don't believe half those stories. Besides they had to improvise everything in a hurry. And anyhow it wasn't a *Socialist* Government.

GERALD (*mildly*): But you don't know they'd be any better. They might be worse—less experience.

MADGE (*same tone*): Oh—I know that *experience*! We're always having that flung in our faces. When all that's wanted is a little intelligence—and enthusiasm—and—and decency.

GERALD (*to MRS. C. rather as one adult to another at children's party*): I've been conscripted for the next scene. To be a general or something.

HAZEL: We haven't fancy dress for you.

GERALD: Good!

MRS. C.: I really mustn't neglect them any longer, must I? And most of them will be going soon. Then we can have a nice cosy little party of our own.

Goes out.

CAROL (*to GERALD*): Well, you must look different somehow, you know. You could turn your coat inside out.

GERALD: I don't think that would be very effective.

CAROL (*impatiently*): Wear an overcoat then. Oh—and—— (*Fishes out a large false moustache and gives it to him.*) Put this on. That's a very good one.

GERALD *takes and looks at it dubiously.* JOAN *rushes in, more animated now her ordeal is over.*

JOAN (*excitedly, girlish*): Hazel, d'you know who's here? You'll never guess!

HAZEL: Who?

JOAN (*ignoring this*): That *awful* little man who always stares at you—the one who followed us once all round the Park——

HAZEL: He's *not*!

JOAN: He is, I tell you. I distinctly saw him, standing at the side, near the door.

GERALD: This sounds like my friend Beevers.

HAZEL: Do you mean to say the man you brought is *that* awful little man? Well, you're the absolute limit, Gerald Thornton! He's a

dreadful little creature. Every time I go out, he's somewhere about, staring and staring at me. And now you bring him here!

GERALD (*not worried by this outburst*): Oh—he's not so bad. He insisted on my bringing him, and your mother said it was all right. You shouldn't be so devastating, Hazel.

JOAN (*giggly*): I told you he must be mad about you, Hazel.

HAZEL (*the haughty beauty now*): I swear I won't speak to him. He just would butt in like this!

CAROL: Why shouldn't he, poor little manny?

HAZEL: Shut up, Carol, you don't know anything about him.

Enter KAY and ALAN.

KAY: That wasn't much good. The Costers were a wash-out. Oh—that's all right, Carol. Now you're a general, Gerald, and the others are recruits. Hurry up, Alan, and put something different on. Gerald, you're inspecting them—you know, make up something silly—and then say to one of them: Look at your *foot*, my man." Anyhow, bring in "foot".

GERALD: Have I only two recruits, Carol and Alan?

KAY: No, mother's sending in another man. They aren't guessing anything yet, but that's simply because it's all such a muddle. I don't think I like charades as much as I used to do. Dad was marvellous at them. (*To GERALD.*) He always did very fat men. You'd better be a fat general. And you can be fat, too, Alan.

Piano can be heard playing softly off. As the men are stuffing cushions under coats, and JOAN and KAY and MADGE are finishing removing their last things, ERNEST BEEVERS enters slowly and shyly. He is a little man, about thirty, still socially shy and awkward, chiefly because his social background is rather lower in the scale than that of the CONWAYS, but there is a suggestion of growing force and self-confidence in him. He is obviously attracted towards the whole family, but completely fascinated by HAZEL.

ERNEST (*shyly, awkwardly*): Oh—er—Mrs. Conway told me to come in here.

KAY: Yes, of course. You've to be one of the recruits in this next bit.

ERNEST: I'm—not much good—at this sort of thing—you know——

KAY: It doesn't matter. Just be silly.

GERALD: Oh—Beevers—sorry! I'd better introduce you. (*Carries off slightly awkward situation with determined light touch.*) This—is Mr. Ernest Beevers, a rather recent arrival in our—er—progressive

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city. Now all these are Conways, except this young lady—Miss Joan Helford——

ERNEST (*seriously*): How d'you do?

JOAN (*faintly giggly*): How d'you do?

GERALD: This is Kay, who decided to be twenty-one to-day so that we could have this party——

ERNEST: Many happy returns.

KAY (*nicely*): Thank you.

GERALD: She's the literary genius of this distinguished family. Over there is Madge, who's been to Girton and will try to convert you to Socialism.

ERNEST: I'm afraid she won't succeed.

GERALD: This strange-looking middle-aged person is young Carol——

CAROL (*nicely*): Hello!

ERNEST (*grateful for this, smiling*): Hello!

GERALD: Alan I think you've met already. (*Teasing.*) Oh—and let me see—yes, this is Hazel. She creates such havoc that when the Leicesters were stationed here the Colonel wrote and asked her to stay indoors when they had route marches.

ERNEST (*solemnly*): How d'you do?

HAZEL (*crossly*): Don't be idiotic, Gerald. (*Very quickly to ERNEST.*) How d'you do?

Faint giggle from JOAN.

ALAN (*to ERNEST*): You'd better do something funny to yourself. Is there anything here you'd like?

ERNEST pokes about in the things, while HAZEL looks disdainfully on and JOAN wants to giggle. ERNEST is very clumsy now.

KAY: Carol and Alan, you start. You're recruits. Carol can do bits of Mr. Pennyman to fill in.

CAROL, followed by ALAN, goes out. GERALD is waiting for BEEVERS. KAY goes out.

JOAN: What did your mother say, Hazel, about removing?

HAZEL: Oh, of course, she won't think of it. And she's been offered five thousand pounds—*five thousand*—for this house!

ERNEST (*the business man*): Tell her to take it. I'll bet in ten years she couldn't get two thousand. It's only this temporary shortage that's forced prices of property up. You'll see 'em come down with a bang yet.

HAZEL (*snubbing him*): But she adores being here, of course, and so it's hopeless.

ERNEST *realises he has been snubbed. He has now made a few ridiculous changes in his clothes. He looks hard at HAZEL, who will not return his look. JOAN still giggly.*

ERNEST (*with dignity which ill assorts with his appearance*): If I spoke out of my turn, I'm sorry.

KAY (*looking in*): Hurry up, Mr. Beevers.

ERNEST (*hurrying forward*): I'm no good at this, you know, Miss Conway, and it's no use pretending I am——

But she rushes him and GERALD off, and follows them. JOAN bursts into a peal of laughter.

HAZEL (*indignantly*): I don't think it's funny, Joan. I'm *furios*.

JOAN (*between gurgles and gasps*): He—looked—so—silly.

HAZEL *begins laughing, too, and they laugh together, rocking round.*

HAZEL (*hardly distinguishable*): Did you hear him? "If I spoke out of my turn, I'm sorry."

JOAN (*hardly distinguishable*): We ought to have said "Pleased to meet you," and then he'd have said "Granted."

KAY *comes back, and looks rather severely at these two.*

KAY (*severely*): I think you were rather beastly to that little man.

They still laugh, and as she looks at them KAY begins to laugh too. They all laugh.

HAZEL (*coming to*): Oh—dear! Oh—dear! But that's the little man I told you about, Kay, who always stared, and once followed us round.

KAY: Well, now he'll be able to raise his little hat.

HAZEL (*vehemently*): And that's all he'll jolly well get out of this, I'll tell you. And I think Gerald Thornton had the cheek of the devil to bring him here. Just because he's a new client.

JOAN (*still giggly*): You don't think you'll marry him then, Hazel?

HAZEL: Ugh! I'd just as soon marry a—a ferret.

KAY (*rather loftily*): I don't believe you two ever think or talk about anything but clothes and going to London and young men and marriage.

HAZEL (*not too rudely*): Oh, don't you start being so grand! (*Quotes dramatically.*) *The Garden of Stars.*

KAY (*hastily*): Now, shut up, Hazel!

HAZEL (*to JOAN*): That's what she called the last novel she started.

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The Garden of Stars. And there were so many bits of paper with the opening words on that I know them off by heart. (*Quotes dramatically. As soon as she begins KAY makes a rush at her, but she dodges, still quoting.*) "Marion went out into the still smooth night. There was no moon but already—already—the sky was silver-dusted with stars. She passed through the rose garden, the dying scent of the roses meeting the grey moths——"

KAY (*shouting her down*): I know it's all wrong, but I tore it up, didn't I?

HAZEL (*mildly*): Yes, my duck. And then you cried.

KAY (*fiercely*): I've just began a real one. With some *guts* in it. You'll see.

HAZEL: I'll bet it's about a girl who lives in a town just like New-lingham.

KAY (*still fierce*): Well, why shouldn't it be? You wait, that's all.

GERALD, *plus false moustache*, ALAN and ERNEST *in their absurd get-up come in slowly and solemnly.*

GERALD: That's true, Alan.

ERNEST (*seriously*): But they can't expect people to behave differently when they've still got their war restrictions on everything. They can't have it both ways.

GERALD: Well, there's still a lot of profiteering.

ERNEST: You've got to let business find its own level. The more interference the worse it is.

ALAN: The worse for everybody?

ERNEST (*decidedly*): Yes.

ALAN (*stoutly, for him*): I doubt it.

ERNEST (*not too unpleasantly*): You're working in the Town Hall, aren't you? Well, you can't learn much about these things there, y'know.

KAY (*with tremendous irony*): I say! You three must have been terribly good in the charade, weren't you?

ALAN: No, we weren't very amusing.

CAROL (*who has just entered*): Oh—they were awful. No, you weren't *too* bad, Mr. Beevers, especially for a man who was doing a charade in a strange house.

ERNEST: Now I call that handsome, Miss Carol.

KAY (*briskly*): The whole word now. *Pussyfoot*. It's supposed to be a party in America, and we can't have anything to drink. We won't bother dressing up for this. Just some good *acting*. I'll say the word.

ACT I TIME AND THE CONWAYS

Joan, tell Madge, she's in this. Just the girls, for the grand finale.

JOAN goes.

GERALD (*now normal again*): So we're sacked?

KAY: Yes. No good.

GERALD: Then we can give ourselves a drink. We've earned a drink. Any dancing afterwards?

KAY: There might be, after mother's done her singing.

GERALD: Do you dance, Beevers?

ERNEST: No, never had time for it.

HAZEL (*significantly, in loud clear tone*): Yes, we must have some dancing, Gerald.

ERNEST *looks hard at her. She gives him a wide innocent stare of complete indifference. He nods, turns and goes. GERALD, after distributing a smile or two, follows him. CAROL is busy getting out of her Mr. Pennyman disguise.*

CAROL (*excitedly*): Kay, we could have done the Prince of Wales in America for this last scene. Why didn't we think of it? You could be the Prince of Wales, and you could fall in love with Hazel, who could turn out to be Pussyfoot's daughter.

KAY (*laughing*): Mother'd be shocked. And so would some of the others.

CAROL: I'd hate to be a Prince of Wales, wouldn't you?

HAZEL (*with decision*): I'd love it.

CAROL: Old Mrs. Ferguson—you know, the one with the queer eye—the rather frightening one—told me there was an old prophecy that when King David came to the throne of Britain everything would be wonderful.

Sound off of a loud shout, then confused voices and laughter.

KAY: What's that?

HAZEL (*excitedly*): It's Robin.

They all look up with eager interest. HAZEL moves, but before she gets very far, ROBIN dashes in. He is twenty-three, and a rather dashing, good-looking young man in the uniform of an R.A.F. officer. He is in tremendous spirits. He carries a small package.

ROBIN (*loudly*): Hello, kids! Hazel! (*Kisses her.*) Kay, many happies! (*Kisses her.*) Carol, my old hearty! (*Kisses her.*) Gosh! I've had a dash to get here in time. Did half the journey on one of our lorries. And I didn't forget the occasion, Kay. What about that? (*Throws her the parcel, which she opens and finds is a silk scarf.*) All right, isn't it?

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KAY (*gratefully*): It's lovely, Robin. Lovely, lovely!

ROBIN: That's the stuff to give 'em. And I've finished. Out! Demobbed at last!

HAZEL: Oo—grand! Have you seen mother?

ROBIN: Of course I have, you chump. You ought to have seen her face when I told her I was now a civilian again. Golly! we'll have some fun now, won't we?

KAY: Lots and lots.

CAROL: Have you seen Alan?

ROBIN: Just for a second. Still the solemn old bird, isn't he?

CAROL (*very young and solemn*): In my opinion, Alan is a very wonderful person.

ROBIN (*rattling on*): I know. You always thought that, didn't you? Can't quite see it myself, but I'm very fond of the old crawler. How's the writing, Kay?

KAY: I'm still trying—and learning.

ROBIN: That's the stuff. We'll show 'em. This is where the Conways really begin. How many young men, Hazel?

HAZEL (*calmly*): Nobody to speak of.

CAROL: She'd worked her way up to Colonels, hadn't you, Haze?

KAY (*affectionately*): Now that it's civilians, she's having to change her technique—and she's a bit uncertain yet.

ROBIN: All jealousy that, isn't it, Hazel? (MRS. C. *appears, carrying a tray laden with sandwiches, cake, etc., and some beer.*) A-ha, here we are! (*Rushes to take the tray from her.* MRS. C. *is very happy now.*)

MRS. C. (*beaming*): Isn't this nice! Now we're *all* here. I knew somehow you were on your way, Robin, even though you didn't tell us—you naughty boy.

ROBIN: Couldn't, Mother, honestly. Only wangled it at the last minute.

MRS. C. (*to KAY*): Finish your charade now, dear.

ROBIN: Charade! Can I be in this? I used to be an ace at charades.

MRS. C.: No, dear, they're just finishing. We can have as many charades as we want now you're home for good. Have something to eat and talk to me while they're doing the last bit.

KAY (*to HAZEL and CAROL*): Come on, you two. We can collect Madge out there. Remember, it's an American party, and we can't have anything to drink, and then, after kicking up a row, you ask who's giving the party, and then I'll say *Pussyfoot*.

She is going off and the others following her as she is saying this.

MRS. C. *hastily puts some of the old clothes together, while ROBIN settles down to the tray.* MRS. C. *then comes and watches him eat and drink with maternal delight. Both are happy and relaxed, at ease with each other.*

MRS. C.: Is there anything you want there, Robin?

ROBIN (*mouth full*): Yes thanks, Mother. Gosh, you don't know what it feels like to be out at last!

MRS. C.: I do, you silly boy. What do you think I feel, to have you back at last—for good?

ROBIN: I must get some clothes.

MRS. C.: Yes, some really nice ones. Though it's a pity you can't keep on wearing that uniform. You look so smart in it. Poor Alan—he was only a corporal or something, y'know, and had the most hideous uniform, nothing seemed to fit him—Alan never looked *right* in the Army.

ROBIN: He's got a piffling sort of job at the Town Hall, hasn't he?

MRS. C.: Yes. He seems to like it, though. And perhaps he'll find something better later on.

ROBIN (*eagerly*): I've got all sorts of plans, y'know, Mother. We've all been talking things over in the mess. One of our chaps knows Jimmy White—you know, *the* Jimmy White—you've heard of him—and he thinks he can wangle me an introduction to him. My idea is something in the car and motor-bike line. I understand 'em, and I've heard people are buying like mad. And I have my gratuity, you know.

MRS. C.: Yes, dear, we'll have to talk about all that. There's plenty of time now, thank goodness! Don't you think all the girls are looking well?

ROBIN (*eating and drinking away*): Yes, first-rate, especially Hazel.

MRS. C.: Oh—of course Hazel's the one everybody notices. You ought to have seen the young men. And Kay—twenty-one—I can hardly believe it—but she's *very* grown-up and serious now—I don't know whether she'll make anything out of this writing of hers—but she is trying very hard—don't tease her too much, dear, she doesn't like it——

ROBIN: I haven't been teasing her.

MRS. C.: No, but Hazel does sometimes—and I know what you children are. Madge has been teaching, you know, but she's trying for a much better school.

ROBIN (*indifferently*): Good old Madge. (*With far more interest.*) I think I ought to go up to town for my clothes, Mother. You can't get anything really decent in Newlingham, and if I'm going to start

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selling cars I've got to look like somebody who knows a good suit when he sees one. Lord!—it's grand to be back again, and not just on a filthy little leave. (*Breaks off, as he looks at her, standing quite close to him.*) Here, Mother—steady!—nothing to cry about now.

MRS. C. (*through her tears, smiling*): I know. That's why. You see, Robin—losing your father, then the war coming—taking you—I'm not used to happiness. I've forgotten about it. It's upsetting! And Robin, now you are back—don't go rushing off again, *please*! Don't leave us—not for years and years. Let's all be cosy together and happy again, shall we?

JOAN *enters, then stands awkwardly as she sees them together.*

MRS. C. *turns and sees her. So does ROBIN, and his face lights up.*

MRS. C. *sees ROBIN's face, then looks again at JOAN. This should be played for as long as it will stand.*

JOAN (*rather nervously*): Oh—Mrs. Conway—they've finished the charade—and some people are going—and Madge asked me to tell you they're expecting you to sing something.

MRS. C.: Why didn't she come herself?

JOAN (*rather faltering*): She and Kay and Carol began handing people sandwiches and things as soon as they finished the charade.

ROBIN (*rising*): Hello, Joan!

JOAN (*coming forward, thrilled*): Hello, Robin! Is it—nice to be back again?

ROBIN (*smiling, rather significantly*): Yes, of course.

MRS. C. (*rather irritably*): Really this room's a dreadful mess. I knew it would be. Hazel and Carol brought all these things down here. Joan, go and tell them they must take these things upstairs at once. I can't have this room looking like an old clothes' place. Perhaps you'd like to help them, dear.

JOAN: Yes—rather.

Smiles at ROBIN and goes. MRS. C. turns and looks at him. He smiles at her. She has to smile back.

ROBIN: You're looking very artful, Mother.

MRS. C.: Am I? I'm not feeling very artful. (*Carefully just.*) Joan's grown up to be a very nice-looking girl, hasn't she?

ROBIN (*smiling*): Quite.

MRS. C. (*same careful tone*): And I think she's got a pleasant easy disposition. Not very clever or go-ahead or anything like that. But a thoroughly nice girl.

ROBIN (*not eagerly*): Yes, I'll bet she is.

HAZEL *sails in, to begin packing up the things. This should be done as quickly as possible.*

HAZEL: They're all panting for a song, Mother. They don't even mind if it's German.

MRS. C.: Thank goodness, I was never so stupid as to stop singing German songs. What have Schubert and Schumann to do with Hindenburg and the Kaiser?

CAROL *comes in, followed by JOAN. HAZEL goes with her armful. ROBIN helps JOAN to collect her lot. MRS. C. stands rather withdrawn from them.*

CAROL (*loudly and cheerfully as she collects her stuff*): Everybody guessed the charade, just because it was Pussyfoot—though they hadn't guessed *any* of the syllables. All except Mr. James, who thought it was *Kinema*. (*Hard "k".*) When they say "Kinema" I can't believe I've ever been to one. It sounds like some other kind of place. Robin, have you seen William S. Hart?

ROBIN: Yes.

CAROL (*pausing with her armful, very solemnly*): I love William S. Hart. I wonder what "S." stands for.

ROBIN: Sidney.

CAROL (*turning, in horror*): Robin, it *doesn't*!

Goes out. JOAN now has the remainder of the things.

MRS. C.: Come along, Robin, I may want you and Alan to move the piano for me.

ROBIN: Righto.

They all go out. Nearly all the things have been cleared now. Sounds of the party—vague applause and laughter—off. Then KAY enters quickly and eagerly, and finds a bit of paper and pencil in some convenient drawer or cupboard. She frowns and thinks, then makes some rapid notes, not sitting down but standing against table or bookshelf. A few chords and runs can be heard from the piano. CAROL looks in, to remove the last of the charade things.

CAROL (*with awe, very charming*): Kay, have you suddenly been inspired?

KAY (*looking up, very serious*): No, not really. But I'm bursting with all kinds of feelings and thoughts and impressions—you know——

CAROL (*coming close to her favourite sister*): Oh—yes—so am I. Millions and millions. I couldn't possibly *begin* to write them.

KAY (*that eager young author*): No, but in my novel, a girl goes to a party—you see—and there are some things I've been feeling—very

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subtle things—that I *know* she'd feel—and I want my novel to be very real this time—so I had to scribble them down——

CAROL: Will you tell me them afterwards?

KAY: Yes.

CAROL: Bedroom?

KAY: Yes, if you're not too sleepy.

CAROL: I couldn't be. (*She pauses happily, one earnest young creature staring at the other. And now we can just hear MRS. CONWAY in the drawing-room beginning to sing Schumann's "Der Nussbaum". CAROL is now very solemn, a little awed.*) Kay, I think you're wonderful.

KAY (*awed herself*): I think *life's* wonderful.

CAROL: Both of you are.

CAROL goes out, and now we can hear the lovely rippling Schumann better than before. KAY writes for another moment, then moved by both the music and the sudden ecstasy of creation, she puts down pencil and paper, drifts over to the switch and turns out the lights. The room is not in darkness because light is coming in from the hall. KAY goes to the window and opens the curtains, so that when she sits on the window-seat, her head is silvered in moonlight. Very still, she listens to the music, and seems to stare not at but into something, and as the song goes soaring away, the curtain creeps down.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT II

When the curtain rises, for a moment we think nothing has happened since it came down, for there is the light coming in from the hall, and there is KAY sitting on the window-seat. But then ALAN comes in and switches on the central light, and we see that a great deal must have happened. It is the same room, but it has a different wall-paper, the furniture has been changed round, the pictures and books are not altogether the same as before. We notice a wireless set. The general effect is harder and rather brighter than it was during the party in 1919, and we guess at once that this is present day (1937). KAY and ALAN are not quite the same, after nearly twenty years. KAY has a rather hard, efficient, well-groomed look, that of a woman of forty who has earned her own living for years. ALAN, in his middle forties, is shabbier than he was before—his coat does not match the rest of his suit and really will not do—but he is still the rather shy, awkward, lovable fellow, only now there is about him a certain quiet poise, an inward certainty and serenity, missing from all the others we shall see now.

ALAN (*quietly*): Well—Kay.

KAY (*happily*): Alan!

She jumps up and kisses him. Then they look at one another, smiling a little. He rubs his hands in embarrassment, as he always did.

ALAN: I'm glad you could come. It was the only thing about this business that didn't make me hate the thought of it—the chance you might be able to come. But mother says you're not staying the night.

KAY: I can't, Alan. I must get back to London to-night.

ALAN: Work?

KAY: Yes. I have to go to Southampton in the morning—to write a nice little piece about the newest little film star.

ALAN: Do you often have to do that?

KAY: Yes, Alan, quite often. There are an awful lot of film stars and they're always arriving at Southampton, except when they arrive at Plymouth—damn their eyes! And all the women readers of the *Daily Courier* like to read a bright half-column about their glamorous favourites.

ALAN (*thoughtfully*): They look very nice—but all rather alike.

KAY (*decidedly*): They are all rather alike—and so are my bright

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interviews with 'em. In fact, sometimes I feel we're all just going round and round, like poor old circus ponies.

ALAN (*after a pause*): Are you writing another novel?

KAY (*very quietly*): No, my dear, I'm not. (*Pauses, then gives short laugh.*) I tell myself too many people are writing novels.

ALAN: Well, it does look like that—sometimes.

KAY: Yes. But that's not the real reason. I still feel mine wouldn't be like theirs—anyhow, not the next, even if the last was. But—as things are—I just can't . . .

ALAN (*after a pause*): The last time you wrote, Kay—I mean to me—you sounded rather unhappy, I thought.

KAY (*with self-reproach*): I was. I suppose that's why I suddenly remembered you—and wrote. Not very flattering—to you—is it?

ALAN (*with cheerful modesty*): In a way it is, y'know. Yes, Kay, I'd take that as a compliment.

KAY (*with sudden burst of affection*): Alan! And I loathe that coat you're wearing. It doesn't match the rest of you, does it?

ALAN (*stammering, apologetic*): No—well, you see—I just wear it in the house—an old coat—just as a house coat—it saves my other one—I oughtn't to have put it on to-night. Just habit, y'know. I'll change it before the others come. . . . Why were you so unhappy then—the last time you wrote?

KAY (*in broken painful phrases*): Something—that was always ending—really did come to an end just then. It had lasted ten years—off and on—and eating more of one's life away when it was off than when it was on. He was married. There were children. It was the usual nasty muddle. (*Breaks off.*) Alan, you don't know what day it is to-day?

ALAN (*chuckling*): But I do, I do. And, of course, Mother did, too. Look!

He pulls small package out of his pocket and holds it out to her.

KAY (*after taking it and kissing him*): Alan, you're an angel! I never thought I'd have another single birthday present. And you know how old I am now? Forty. *Forty!*

ALAN (*smiling*): I'm forty-four. And it's all right, y'know. You'll like it. (*Front door bell rings.*) Look at your present. I hope it's all right.

Goes to front door. KAY hastily unwraps her parcel and takes out a hideous cheap little handbag. She looks at it and does not know whether to laugh or cry over the thing. Meanwhile ALAN has brought in JOAN, now Joan Conway, for she married ROBIN. Time

has not been very kind to her. She is now a rather sloppy, querulous woman of forty-one. Her voice has a very irritating quality.

JOAN: Hello, Kay. I didn't think you'd manage to be here—you hardly ever do come to Newlingham now, do you? And I must say I don't blame you. (*Breaks off because she notices the awful handbag.*) Oh—what a——

KAY (*hastily*): Nice, isn't it? Alan has just given it to me. How are the children?

JOAN: Richard's very well, but the doctor says Ann's tonsils ought to come out—though he doesn't tell me who's going to pay for the operation, never thinks about that. They did enjoy those things you sent at Christmas, Kay—I don't know what they'd have done without them, though I did my best.

KAY: I'm sure you did, Joan.

JOAN: Alan was very good to them, too, weren't you, Alan? Though, of course, it's not like their having a father. (*Breaks off and looks miserably at KAY.*) You know, I haven't seen Robin for months. Some people say I ought to divorce him—but—I don't know—(*With sudden misery.*) Honestly, isn't it awful? Oh—Kay. (*Suddenly giggles.*) Doesn't that sound silly—Oh—Kay.

KAY (*wearily*): No, I've stopped noticing it.

JOAN: Richard's always saying Okay—he's heard it at the pictures—and, of course, Ann copies him. (*Breaks off, looks anxiously at them both.*) Do you think it's all right, my coming here to-night? It was Hazel who told me you were having a sort of family meeting, and she thought I ought to be here, and I think so too. But Granny Conway didn't ask me——

KAY (*with a sudden laugh*): Joan, you don't call mother Granny Conway?

JOAN: Well, I got into the habit, y'know, with the children.

KAY: She must loathe it.

ALAN (*apologetically, to JOAN*): I think she does, you know.

JOAN: I must try and remember. Is she upstairs?

ALAN: Yes. Madge is here, too.

JOAN (*nerving herself*): I think—I'll go up and ask her if it's all right—my staying—otherwise I'd feel such a fool.

KAY: Yes, do. And tell her we think you ought to be here—if you want to be——

JOAN: Well, it isn't that—but—you see—if it's about money—I must know something, mustn't I? After all, I'm Robin's wife—and Richard and Ann are his children——

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ALAN (*kindly*): Yes, Joan, you tell mother that, if she objects. But she won't, though.

JOAN *looks at them a moment doubtfully, then goes. They watch her go, then look at one another.*

KAY (*lowering her voice a little*): I suppose Robin's pretty hopeless—but really, Joan's such a fool——

ALAN: Yes, but the way Robin's treated her has made her feel more of a fool than she really is. It's taken away all her confidence in herself, you see, Kay. Otherwise she mightn't have been so bad.

KAY: You used to like Joan, didn't you?

ALAN (*looking at her, then slowly smiling*): You remember when she and Robin told us they were engaged? I was in love with her then. It was the only time I ever fell in love with anybody. And I remember—quite suddenly hating Robin—yes, really hating him. None of this loving and hating lasted, of course—it was just silly stuff. But I remember it quite well.

KAY: Suppose it had been you instead of Robin?

ALAN (*hastily*): Oh—no, that wouldn't have done at all. Really it wouldn't. Most unsuitable!

KAY *laughs in affectionate amusement at his bachelor's horror.*

MADGE *enters. She is very different from the girl of ACT I. She has short greyish hair, wears glasses, and is neatly but severely dressed. She speaks with a dry precision, but underneath her assured schoolmistress manner is a suggestion of the neurotic woman.*

MADGE (*very decisively, as she bustles about the room, finding an envelope and filling her fountain-pen*): I've just told mother that if I hadn't happened to be in the neighbourhood to-day—I've applied for a headship at Borderton, you know, Kay, and had my interview there this afternoon—nothing would have induced me to be here to-night.

KAY: Well, I don't know why you bothered telling her, Madge. You *are* here, that's all that matters.

MADGE: No it isn't. I want her to understand quite clearly that I've no further interest in these family muddles, financial or otherwise. Also, that I would have thought it unnecessary to ask for a day away from my work at Collingfield in order to attend one of these ridiculous hysterical conferences.

KAY: You talk as if you'd been dragged here every few weeks.

MADGE: No I haven't. But I've had a great many more of these silly discussions than you have—please remember, Kay. Mother and Gerald Thornton seem to imagine that the time of a woman journalist in London is far more precious than that of a senior mistress at a large

girls' public school. Why—I can't think. But the result is, I've been dragged in often when you haven't.

KAY (*rather wearily*): All right. But seeing we're both here now, let's make the best of it.

ALAN: Yes, of course.

MADGE: Joan's here. I hope there's no chance of Robin coming too. That's something you've missed so far, I think, Kay. I've had one experience of their suddenly meeting here—Robin half drunk, ready to insult everybody. Joan weeping and resentful—the pair of them discussing every unpleasant detail of their private life—and it's not an experience I want to repeat.

KAY (*lightly, but serious underneath*): I don't blame you, Madge. But for the Lord's sake be human to-night. You're not talking to the Collingfield common room now. This is your nice brother, Alan. I'm your nice sister Kay. We know all about you—

MADGE: That's just where you're wrong. You know hardly anything about me, any of you. The life you don't see—call it the Collingfield common room if that amuses you—is my real life. It represents exactly the sort of person I am now, and what you and Alan and mother remember—and trust mother not to forget anything foolish and embarrassing—is no longer of any importance at all.

KAY: I'd hate to think that, Madge.

ALAN (*shyly, earnestly*): And it isn't true. It really isn't. Because— (*Hesitates, and is lost.*)

MADGE: I heard your extraordinary views the last time I was here, Alan. I also discussed them with Herrickson—our senior Maths. mistress and a most brilliant woman—and she demolished them very thoroughly.

KAY (*to cheer him up*): You tell me, Alan, if there's time later on. We're not going to be trampled on by any of Madge's Miss What's-her-names. And we don't care how brilliant they are, do we, Alan?

ALAN *grins and rubs his hands*. MADGE *deliberately changes the subject*.

MADGE: I hope you're doing something besides this popular journalism now, Kay. Have you begun another book?

KAY: No.

MADGE: Pity, isn't it?

KAY (*after a pause, looking steadily at her*): What about you, Madge? Are you building Jerusalem—in England's green and pleasant land?

MADGE: Possibly not. But I'm trying to put a little knowledge of

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history and a little sense into the heads of a hundred and fifty middle-class girls. It's hard work and useful work. Certainly nothing to be ashamed of.

KAY (*looking hard, speaking very quietly*): Then—why be ashamed?

MADGE (*instantly, loudly*): I'm not.

HAZEL *enters, from outside. She is extremely well dressed, the best dressed of them all, and has not lost her looks, but there is something noticeably subdued, fearful, about her.*

HAZEL: Hello, Madge! (*Sees KAY.*) Kay! (*Kisses her.*)

KAY: Hazel, my dear, you're grander every time I see you.

HAZEL (*preening*): Do you like it?

KAY: Yes—and you didn't get that in Newlingham. At the *Bon Marché*. Do you remember when we used to think the *Bon Marché* marvellous?

HAZEL (*brightening up at this*): Yes—and now they seem ghastly. Well, that's something, isn't it? (*Realises that this gives her away, so hastily asks*): Is Joan here?

ALAN: Yes. She's upstairs with mother. Is Ernest coming to-night?

HAZEL (*hesitating*): I—don't—know.

MADGE: I thought it was understood he was coming. Mother thinks he is. I believe she's rather counting on him.

HAZEL (*hastily*): Well, she mustn't. I've told her not to. I don't even know yet if he'll be here at all.

MADGE (*annoyed*): But this is ridiculous. We're told that things are desperate. Kay and I have to leave our work, travel miles and miles, stop thinking about anything else, and now you don't even know if your own husband will walk down the road to be here.

HAZEL: But you know what Ernest is. He said he *might* come to-night. I asked him again only at lunch time to-day—and he said he didn't know—and then I didn't like——

MADGE (*cutting in sharply*): Didn't like! You mean you *daren't*. That miserable little——

HAZEL: Madge! Please stop.

MADGE *looks at her in contempt, then walks off.* HAZEL *looks very miserable.*

KAY: How are the children?

HAZEL: Peter has a cold again—poor lamb—he's always getting colds. Margaret's all right. Never *any* trouble with her. She's been doing some ballet dancing, y'know, and the teacher thinks she's

marvellous for her age. Oh—you forgot her last birthday, Kay. The child was *so* disappointed.

KAY: I'm sorry. Tell her I'll make up for it at Christmas. I must have been away on a job or something——

HAZEL (*eagerly*): I read your article on Glyrna Foss—you know, about three months ago—when she came over from Hollywood. Did she really say all those things to you, Kay, or did you make them up?

KAY: She said some of them. The rest I made up.

HAZEL (*eagerly*): Did she say anything about Leo Frobisher—her husband, y'know, and they'd just separated?

KAY: Yes, but I didn't print it.

HAZEL (*all eagerness now*): What did she say?

KAY: She said (*imitating very bad type of American voice*), "I'll bet that God-forgotten left-over ham husband of mine gets himself poured out o' the next boat." (*Normal voice, dryly.*) You'd like her, Hazel. She's a sweet child.

HAZEL: She sounds awful, but I suppose you can't judge by the way they talk, using all that slang. And I know you don't think you're very lucky, Kay——

KAY: I vary. Sometimes when I manage to remember what most women go through, all kinds of women all over the world, I don't think, I *know* I'm lucky. But usually—I feel clean out of luck.

HAZEL: I know, that's what I say. But I think you're *very* lucky, meeting all these people, and being in London and all that. Look at me, still in Newlingham, and I *loathe* Newlingham, and it gets worse and worse. Doesn't it, Alan—though I don't suppose you notice?

ALAN: I think it's about the same—perhaps we get worse, that's all.

HAZEL (*looking at him in a sort of impersonal fashion*): Somebody was saying to me only the other day how queer they thought you were, Alan, and you are—really, aren't you? I mean you don't seem to bother about everything as most people do. I've often wondered whether you're happy inside or just dull. But I often wonder about people like that—(*to KAY*) don't you? Though I suppose being so clever now, and a writer and everything, you *know* about them. But I don't. And I simply can't tell from what people look like. We had a maid, y'know, Jessie, and she seemed such a cheerful little thing—always smiling and humming—Ernest used to get quite cross with her—she was *too* cheerful really—and then suddenly she took over twenty aspirins all at once, we had to have the doctor and everything, and she said it was simply because she couldn't bear it any longer—she'd had enough of *everything*, she said. Isn't it strange?

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KAY: But you must feel like that sometimes, don't you?

HAZEL: Yes, I do. But I'm always surprised when other people do, because somehow they never *look* it. Oh——(*gets up and lowers her voice*) Robin rang me up yesterday—he's living in Leicester just now, you know—and I told him about to-night—and he said he might look in because he wouldn't be far away.

ALAN: I hope he doesn't.

KAY: What's he doing now, Hazel?

HAZEL: I don't know really—he's always changing, y'know—but it's something to do with commission. Shall I tell Joan he might be coming here?

KAY: No. Risk it.

Doesn't say any more because MRS. CONWAY comes in now, followed by JOAN. MRS. CONWAY is now a woman of sixty-five, and has not gone neat and modern, but kept to her full-blown Edwardian type.

MRS. C. (*who is still very brisk*): Now then, Hazel, haven't you brought Ernest with you?

HAZEL: No, Mother. I hope—he'll be here soon.

MRS. C.: Of course he will. Well, we can't do anything until Gerald arrives. He knows how things are—exactly. Where's Madge?

KAY: I thought she went upstairs.

MRS. C. (*as she goes to turn on more lights*): She's probably taking something in the bathroom. I've never known anybody who took so many things as poor Madge. She's given herself so many lotions and gargles and sprays that no man has ever looked twice at her—poor thing. Alan, I think we ought to have both port and whisky out, don't you? I told the girl to leave it all ready in the dining-room. Better bring it in. (*ALAN goes out, returning, during following dialogue, carrying a tray, with port and small glasses, whisky and soda and tumblers.*) Now what I'm wondering is this—should we all sit round looking very stiff and formal—y'know, make it a proper business affair, because, after all, it *is* a business affair—or should we make everybody comfortable and *cosy*? What do you think?

KAY: I think—Mother—you're enjoying this.

MRS. C.: Well, after all, why shouldn't I? It's nice to see all you children at home again. Even Madge. (*MADGE enters. MRS. C. probably saw her before, but undoubtedly sees her now.*) I say it's nice to see all you children home again—even you, Madge.

MADGE: I'm not a child and this is no longer my home.

MRS. C. (*sharply*): You were a child once—and a very trouble-

some one too—and for twenty years this was your home—and please don't talk in that tone to me. You're not in a classroom now, remember.

HAZEL: Now—Mother—please—it's not going to be easy to-night—and——

MADGE (*coldly*): Don't worry, Hazel. Mother *enjoys* things not being easy.

She sits down. MRS. C. observes her maliciously, then turns to KAY.

MRS. C.: Kay, *who* was the man the Philipsons saw you dining with at the—what's the name of that restaurant?

KAY: The Ivy, Mother. And the man is a man called Hugo Steel. I've told you already.

MRS. C. (*smoothly*): Yes, dear, but you didn't tell me much. The Philipsons said you seemed awfully friendly together. I suppose he's an old friend?

KAY (*sharply*): Yes.

MRS. C. (*same technique*): Isn't it a pity—you couldn't—I mean, if he's a really nice man.

KAY (*trying to cut it short*): Yes, a great pity.

MRS. C.: I've so often hoped you'd be settled with some nice man—and when the Philipsons told me——

KAY (*harshly*): Mother, I'm forty to-day. Had you forgotten?

MRS. C. (*taking it well*): Of course I hadn't. A mother *always* remembers. Joan——

JOAN (*whose attention has been elsewhere, turning*): Yes, Grannie Conway?

MRS. C. (*crossly*): Don't call me that ridiculous name.

JOAN: I forgot, I'm sorry.

MRS. C.: Didn't I tell you it was Kay's birthday? I've something for you too——

KAY: No, Mother, you mustn't—really——

MRS. C. (*producing small diamond brooch*): There! Your father gave me that, the second Christmas after we were married, and it's a charming little brooch. Brazilian diamonds. It was an old piece then. Look at the colour in the stones. You always get that in the old South American diamonds. There now!

KAY (*gently*): It's very sweet of you, Mother, but really I'd rather not take this from you.

MRS. C.: Don't be absurd. It's mine and now I give it to you. Take

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it or I'll be cross. And many happy returns, of course. (*KAY takes the brooch, then, suddenly rather moved, kisses her mother.*) When you were younger, I never liked you as much as I did Hazel, but now I think I was wrong.

HAZEL: Oh—Mother!

MRS. C.: I know, Hazel dear, but you're such a *fool* with that little husband of yours. Why, if he were mine——

HAZEL (*sharply for her*): Well he isn't—and you really know very little about him.

MRS. C. (*as she looks about her*): It's time the men were here. I've always hated seeing a lot of women sitting about, with no men. *They* always look silly, and then I feel silly myself. I don't know why. (*Notices ALAN. With some malice.*) Of course you're here, Alan. I was forgetting you. Or forgetting you were a man.

ALAN (*mildly*): I must grow a shaggy beard and drum on my chest and ro-o-ar!

JOAN (*doing her best*): When their Uncle Frank—you know, Freda's husband, they live in London—took the children to the Zoo for the first time, little Richard was only five—and there was an enormous monkey—what Alan said reminded me of it—and——

MRS. C. (*cutting this ruthlessly*): Would anybody like a glass of port? Kay? Hazel? What about you, Madge? It's a scholarly wine. You remember what Meredith wrote about it in *The Egoist*. But nobody reads Meredith now and nobody takes port. I used to read Meredith when I was a girl and thought I was very clever. But I didn't like port then. Now I don't care about Meredith, but I rather like port. (*She has poured herself a glass of port, and now sips it.*) It's not good port this—even I know that, though men always say women don't know anything about it—but it's rich and warming, even this—like a handsome compliment. That's gone too. Nobody pays compliments any more—except old Doctor Halliday, who's well over eighty and has no memory at all. He talked to me for half an hour the other day, thinking I was Mrs. Rushbury—— (*Ring at bell.*) There! That's probably Gerald.

MADGE (*wearily*): At last!

MRS. C. (*maliciously*): Yes, Madge, but you mustn't be so impatient.

MADGE *glares at her*. ALAN *is now ushering in* GERALD THORNTON, *who carries a brief-case, and* ERNEST BEEVERS. GERALD *is over fifty now, and though careful of his appearance, he looks it. He is grey and wears glasses. He is much drier and harder than he was in ACT I. ERNEST BEEVERS looks far more prosperous than*

he did before, and has lost his early shyness. With the arrival of these two, the party is apparently complete, so that there is no longer the feeling of waiting about.

MRS. C.: Well, Gerald, will you have a drink before you begin talking?

GERALD: No, thank you. (*He turns to KAY.*) How are you, Kay?

KAY: Quite well, thank you, Gerald. (*Stares at him.*) I'm sorry, but it's true.

GERALD: What is?

KAY: I always remember your saying, years ago, that you didn't mind living in Newlingham but you were determined to be as different as possible from the Newlingham type of man.

GERALD (*hastily, frowning a little*): I don't remember saying that——

KAY: Yes, you did. And now—I'm sorry, Gerald, but it's true—you suddenly look like *all* those Newlingham men rolled into one——

GERALD (*rather shortly*): What do I do? Apologise?

Turns away, leaving her regarding him speculatively.

HAZEL (*who has managed to get ERNEST to herself a moment*): Oh—Ernest—I'm so glad you're here——

ERNEST (*not pleasantly*): You are, eh?

HAZEL (*who knows him by this time*): I suppose that means you won't stay now—just to show me——

ERNEST: I don't need to show you. You know, by this time.

HAZEL (*lowering voice*): Ernest—please—be nice to them to-night—especially to Mother—you could be such a help if you wanted to be——

ERNEST (*cutting through this*): I don't know what you're talking about.

They both notice then that MADGE is quite near, regarding them with a contemptuous smile. ERNEST gives her a sharp look, then turns away. HAZEL looks deeply embarrassed, then looks as if she was about to appeal to MADGE.

MADGE (*coolly*): I shouldn't say a word, if I were you, Hazel. I mean, to me. It would only make it worse.

MRS. C. (*loud cheerful tone*): Now then, everybody, please be quiet and pay attention. We must be very business-like, mustn't we, Gerald? I'm so glad you were able to come, Ernest. You'll help us to be business-like, won't you?

ERNEST (*grimly*): Yes.

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MADGE: And that doesn't mean you're at liberty to make yourself unpleasant.

MRS. C. (*sharply*): Be quiet, Madge. (*Turning, with smile and great social air, to GERALD.*) Now then, Gerald, we're all waiting. Tell us all about it.

GERALD, *who has been glancing at his papers, looks up at her and round the waiting circle with a sort of despair, as if to ask what could be done with such people.*

GERALD (*in dry legal tone*): Acting under instructions from Mrs. Conway, after it was decided you should all meet here, I have prepared a short statement of Mrs. Conway's present financial position—

MRS. C. (*protesting*): Gerald.

GERALD (*rather despairing*): Yes?

MRS. C.: Must you talk in that awful dry inhuman way? I mean, after all, I've known you since you were a boy, and the children have known you all their lives, and you're beginning to talk as if you'd never seen any of us before. And it sounds so horrid.

GERALD: But I'm not here now as a friend of the family, but as your solicitor.

MRS. C. (*with dignity*): No. You're here as a friend of the family who also happens to be my solicitor. And I think it would be much better if you told us all in a simple friendly way what the position is.

ALAN: I think that would be better, you know, Gerald.

KAY: So do I. When you turn on that legal manner, I can't take you seriously—I feel you're still acting in one of our old charades.

HAZEL (*with sudden warmth*): Oh—weren't they fun! And you were so good in them, Gerald. Why can't we have some more—

ERNEST (*brutally*): What—at your age?

HAZEL: I don't see why not. Mother was older than we are now when she used to play—

GERALD (*not amused by all this*): You're not proposing to turn this into a charade, are you, Hazel?

KAY: What a pity it isn't one!

ALAN (*very quietly*): Perhaps it is.

MRS. C.: Now don't you start being silly, Alan. Now then, Gerald, just tell us how things are—and don't read out a lot of figures and dates and things—I know you've brought them with you—but keep them for anybody who wants to have a look at them—perhaps you'd like to have a look at them afterwards, Ernest—

ERNEST: I might. (*To GERALD.*) Go ahead.

GERALD (*dryly*): Well, the position is this. Mrs. Conway for a long time now has derived her income from two sources. A holding in Farrow and Conway Limited. And some property in Newlingham, the houses at the north end of Church Road. Farrow and Conway were hit badly by the slump and have not recovered yet. The houses in Church Road are not worth anything like what they were, and the only chance of making that property pay is to convert the houses into flats. But this would demand a substantial outlay of capital. Mrs. Conway has received an offer for her holding in Farrow and Conway Limited, but it is a very poor offer. It would not pay for the reconstruction of the Church Road property. Meanwhile that property may soon be a liability instead of an asset. So, you see, the position is very serious.

MADGE (*coldly*): I must say I'm very much surprised. I always understood that mother was left extremely well provided for.

MRS. C. (*proudly*): Certainly I was. Your father saw to that.

GERALD: Both the shares and the property have declined in value.

MADGE: Yes, but even so—I'm still surprised. Mother must have been very extravagant.

GERALD: Mrs. Conway hasn't been as careful as she might have been.

MRS. C.: There were six of you to bring up and educate——

MADGE: It isn't that. I know how much *we* cost. It's since then that the money's been spent. And I know who must have had most of it—Robin!

MRS. C. (*angry now*): That'll do, Madge. It was my money——

MADGE: It wasn't. It was only yours to hold in trust for us. Alan, you're the eldest and you've been here all the time, why didn't you do something?

ALAN: I'm afraid—I—haven't bothered much about—these things——

MADGE (*with growing force*): Then you ought to have done. I think it's absolutely wicked. I've been working hard earning my living for over twenty years, and I've looked forward to having something from what father left, enough to pay for a few really good holidays or to buy myself a little house of my own—and now it's all gone—just because mother and Robin between them have flung it away——

MRS. C. (*angrily*): You ought to be ashamed of yourself, talking like that! What if I have helped Robin? He needed it, and I'm his mother. If you'd needed it, I'd have helped you too——

MADGE: You wouldn't. When I told you I had a chance to buy a partnership in that school, you only laughed at me——

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MRS. C.: Because you were all right where you were and didn't need to buy any partnerships.

MADGE: And Robin did, I suppose?

MRS. C.: Yes, because he's a man—with a wife and children to support. This is just typical of you, Madge. Call yourself a Socialist and blame people for taking an interest in money, and then it turns out you're the most mercenary of us all.

MADGE: I don't call myself a Socialist—though that's nothing to do with it—

ERNEST (*who has been glancing at an evening paper, breaking in brutally*): How long does this go on? Because I've something else to do.

MRS. C. (*trying hard to placate him*): That's all right, Ernest. Look what you've done now, Madge. Made Joan cry.

JOAN (*suddenly weeping quietly in the background*): I'm sorry—I just—remembered—so many things—that's all—

GERALD: At the present moment, Mrs. Conway has a considerable overdraft at the bank. Now there are two possible courses of action. One is to sell the houses for what they'll fetch, and to hold on to the Farrow and Conway shares. But I warn you that the houses won't fetch much. The alternative is to sell the shares, then to raise an additional sum—probably between two or three thousand pounds—and to convert the houses into flats—

MRS. C. (*hopefully*): We've had a sort of scheme from an architect, and really it looks most attractive. There'd be at least thirty nice flats, and you know what people will pay for flats nowadays. Don't you think it's a splendid idea, Ernest? (*He does not reply. She smiles at him and then her smile falters, but she returns hopefully to the theme.*) I felt if we all discussed it in a nice friendly way, we could decide something. I know you business men like everything cut-and-dried, but I believe it's better to be nice and friendly. It isn't true that people will only do things for money. I'm always being surprised about that. People are very nice and kind, really— (*Breaks off, then looks at the women, more intimate tone.*) Only last week, I went to old Mrs. Jepson's funeral, and I was walking back through the cemetery with Mrs. Whitehead—I hadn't been round there for years—and I saw Carol's grave—and, of course, I was rather upset, suddenly coming on it like that—but it was so beautifully kept, with flowers—lovely flowers—growing there. And I thought, now there's an instance—nobody's told them to do that or paid them for it—it's just natural kindness—

MADGE (*harshly*): No it isn't. Somebody must have been paying for it.

KAY (*turning*): Alan! It must be you. Isn't it?

ALAN: Well—I do send them something—once every year, y'know—it isn't much.

HAZEL: Oh, Mother—I'd forgotten about Carol—it's sixteen years ago.

ALAN: Seventeen.

HAZEL (*in melancholy wonder*): Why, my Margaret's nearly as big as she was. Doesn't that seem strange, Kay?

KAY: I'd nearly forgotten about Carol too.

MRS. C. (*with some emotion*): Don't think I had—because I was so stupid about that grave. I'm not one of those people who remember graves, it's human beings I remember. Only the other day, when I was sitting upstairs, I heard Carol shouting "Mo-ther, mo-ther"—you know how she used to do. And then I began thinking about her, my poor darling, and how she came in that awful day, her face quite greyish, and said, "Mother, I've the most sickening pain," and then it was too late when they operated——

HAZEL: Yes, Mother, we remember.

ERNEST (*harsh and astonishing*): I'll tell you what you don't remember—and what some of you never even knew. She was the best of the lot—that one—little Carol—worth all the rest of you put together.

HAZEL (*a shocked wife*): Ernest!

ERNEST: Yes, and I'm counting you in. You were the one I wanted—that's all right, I got the one I wanted—but it didn't take me two hours to see that little Carol was the best of the lot. (*Adds gloomily.*) Didn't surprise me when she went off like that. Out! Finish! Too good to last.

MRS. C. (*now near to tears*): Ernest is quite right. She was the best of you all. My darling baby, I haven't forgotten you, I haven't forgotten you. (*Rising.*) Oh, why isn't Robin here? (*Begins weeping, also moves away.*) Go on, Gerald, explaining to them. I shan't be long. Don't move.

Goes out in tears. There is silence for a moment or two.

MADGE: Surely, under the circumstances, it's absurd that mother and Alan should continue living in this house. It's much too large for them.

ALAN (*mildly*): Yes. We could do with something much smaller now.

MADGE: Then this house could be sold, that would help. It's mother's freehold, isn't it?

GERALD: I think it would be better to move into something smaller.

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just to cut down living expenses. But this house wouldn't fetch very much now.

HAZEL: Why, mother was offered thousands and thousands for it just after the War.

ERNEST (*dryly*): Yes, but this isn't just after the War. It's just before the next War.

GERALD: How much do *you* think, Ernest?

ERNEST: Take anything you can get for it.

KAY: Well, what are we supposed to do? If the worst comes to the worst, we can club together to keep mother going——

MADGE: But it's monstrous. When I was at home—and knew about things—we were considered quite well off. There were all the shares and property father left, not simply for mother but for all of us. And now not only has it nearly all been frittered away, but we're expected to provide for mother——

KAY (*rather wearily*): But if the money's gone, it's gone.

GERALD: No, the point is this——

He is stopped by a loud ring at bell. They turn and look. ALAN moves, then stops. ROBIN has marched in. He is wearing an old raincoat. He is shabbily smart, and looks what he is, a slackish, hard-drinking unsuccessful man of forty-two.

ROBIN: Hello! All here? Where's mother?

ALAN: She'll be back in a minute.

ROBIN takes off his raincoat and negligently gives it to ALAN, who characteristically accepts it and puts it away. ROBIN takes no notice of this, but looks at JOAN.

ROBIN: Well, Joan. How are the offspring?

JOAN (*stiffly*): They're quite well, Robin.

ROBIN: Still telling them what an awful man their father is?

MADGE: Are we going to have this all over again?

ROBIN: No, you're not—dear old Madge. Do I see a drink over there? I do. Have a drink, Gerald. Ernest, have a drink. No? Well, I will. (*Goes and helps himself liberally to whisky and soda. Turns after first quick drink, faces them and grins.*) Hello, Kay. Condescending to visit the provinces again, eh?

KAY: Yes, but I've got to be back sometime to-night.

ROBIN: Don't blame you. Wish I was going back to town. That's the place. I've half a mind to chuck what I'm doing and try my luck there again. Know several decent chaps there.

KAY: What are you doing now, Robin?

ROBIN (*rather gloomily*): Trying to sell a new heavy motor oil. I ought to have tried your stunt—writing. Might, one day, I could tell 'em something—my oath I could. (*Finishes his drink rather noisily.*) Well, don't let me interrupt the business. Or are you waiting for mother?

MADGE: No, we're better without her.

ROBIN (*belligerently*): Yes, you would think that! But don't forget, it's her money—

He stops because MRS. C. reappears, all smiles.

MRS. C. (*joyfully*): Robin! Now this is nice! (*Sweeps across and kisses him. There is perhaps a touch of defiance to the others in the warmth of her welcome.*) Are you staying the night?

ROBIN: I wasn't, but I could do—(*with a grin*) in Alan's best pyjamas.

They settle themselves.

MADGE: We were just saying, Mother, that it was absurd for you to keep on living here. The house is much too big and expensive now.

ROBIN: That's for mother to decide—

MRS. C.: No, that's all right, dear. It is too big now, and, of course, if I sold it I could probably raise enough to convert the Church Road houses into flats.

ERNEST: No you couldn't. Nothing like.

MRS. C. (*with dignity*): Really, Ernest! I was offered four thousand pounds for it once.

ERNEST: You ought to have taken it.

GERALD: I'm afraid you can't count on getting much for this house, though, of course, you'll save money by living in a smaller place.

ROBIN: Not much, though. She'd have to pay rent for the smaller house, and this is hers.

GERALD (*rather impatiently for him, probably because ROBIN is here*): But rates and taxes are fairly heavy on this house. I want you all to understand that the present situation is very unsatisfactory. The overdraft can be paid off, of course, simply by selling shares or some of the houses, but after that Mrs. Conway would be worse off than ever. If the money for the conversion scheme could be raised, then the Church Road property would bring in a decent income.

MRS. C.: And I'm sure that's the thing to do. Flats. I might live in one of them myself—a nice, cosy little flat. Delightful!

GERALD: But after you've sold your shares you've still to find another two or three thousand to pay for the conversion into flats.

MRS. C.: But couldn't I borrow that?

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GERALD: Not from the bank. They won't accept the Church Road houses as security for a loan to convert them into flats. I've tried that.

HAZEL (*hopefully, and a shade timidly*): Ernest—could lend you the money.

ERNEST (*staggered by this*): *What!*

HAZEL (*rather faltering now*): Well, you could easily afford it, Ernest.

MRS. C. (*smiling*): From what I hear, you're very well off indeed these days, Ernest.

GERALD: Oh—there's no doubt about that.

MRS. C. (*hoping this will win him over*): And it only seems yesterday, Ernest, that you first came here—a very shy young man from nowhere.

ERNEST (*grimly*): It's twenty years ago, to be exact—but that's just what I was—a shy young man from nowhere. And when I managed to wangle myself into this house I thought I'd got somewhere.

MRS. C.: I remember so well feeling that about you at the time, Ernest.

ERNEST: Yes. I was made to feel I'd got somewhere, too. But I stuck it. I've always been able to stick it, when I've had my mind on something I badly wanted. That's how I've managed to get on.

ROBIN (*who doesn't like him, obviously*): Don't begin to tell us now that you landed here with only a shilling in your pocket—

MRS. C. (*warning, reproachful, yet secretly amused*): Now, now, Robin!

ERNEST (*in level unpleasant tone*): I wasn't going to. Don't worry, you're not going to have the story of *my* life. All I was about to say was—that as far as I'm concerned, you can whistle for your two or three thousand pounds. You won't get a penny from me. And I might as well tell you—while I'm making myself unpleasant—that I could lend you the two or three thousand without feeling it. Only, I'm not going to. Not a penny.

HAZEL (*indignation struggling with her fear of him*): You make me feel ashamed.

ERNEST (*staring hard at her*): Oh! Why? (*She does not reply, but begins to crumple under his hard stare.*) Go on. Tell 'em why I make you feel ashamed. Tell *me*. Or would you like to tell me later when I'm telling you a few things?

HAZEL *crumples into tears*. ROBIN *jumps up, furious*.

ROBIN: I never did like you, Beever. I've half a mind to boot you out of this house.

ERNEST (*no coward*): You do, and I'll bring an action for assault. And I'd enjoy it. My money or the boot, eh? I told Hazel a long time ago that not one of you would ever get a penny out of me. And I'm not mean. Ask her. But I swore to myself after the very first night I came here, when you were all being so high and mighty—especially you—that you'd never see a penny that I ever made.

ROBIN (*with a lurking grin*): I see.

ERNEST (*very sharply*): What's that mean? By God, she *has*! She's been giving you money—*my* money.

HAZEL (*terribly alarmed now*): Oh—Robin, why did you?

ROBIN (*irritably*): What does it matter? He can't eat you.

ERNEST (*very quietly and deadly, to HAZEL*): Come on.

Goes out. HAZEL looks terrified.

MADGE: Don't go, if you don't want to.

KAY: Hazel, there's nothing to be afraid of.

HAZEL (*sincere, quiet, desperate*): There is. I'm frightened of *him*. Except right at the first—I've always been frightened of him.

ROBIN (*noisily*): Don't be silly. This little pipsqueak! What can *he* do?

HAZEL: I don't know. It isn't that. It's just something about him.

ERNEST (*returning with his overcoat on, to HAZEL*): Come on. I'm going.

HAZEL (*summoning up all her courage*): N-no.

He waits and looks at her. She slowly moves towards him, fearful and ashamed. MRS. C. moves hastily over towards ERNEST.

MRS. C. (*excitedly*): You sneaked your way in here, Ernest Beevers, and somehow you persuaded or bullied Hazel, who was considered then one of the prettiest girls in Newlingham, into marrying you—

HAZEL (*imploring her*): No, Mother—please don't—

MRS. C.: I'll tell him now what I've always wanted to tell him. (*Approaching ERNEST with vehemence.*) I was a fool. My husband wouldn't have had such a bullying mean little rat near the house. I never liked you. And I'm not surprised to hear you say you've always hated us. Don't ever come here again, don't ever let me see you again. I only wish I was Hazel for just one day, I'd show you something. What—you—my daughter——! (*In a sudden fury she slaps him hard across the face, with a certain grand magnificence of manner.*) Now bring an action for that!

Stands there, blazing at him. He rubs his cheek a little, backs a step or two, looking at her steadily.

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ERNEST (*quietly*): You've done a lot of dam' silly things in your time, Mrs. Conway, but you'll find that's the dam' silliest. (*Turns and walks to door. At door he turns quickly to HAZEL.*) Come on.

Goes out. HAZEL is wretched.

HAZEL: Oh—Mother—you shouldn't.

ROBIN (*rather grandly*): She did quite right. And you just let me know—if he gives you any trouble.

HAZEL (*tearfully, shaking her head as she wanders towards door*): No, Robin. You don't understand . . . you don't understand. . . .

She goes out slowly. A strained silence. Mrs. C. goes back to her place.

MRS. C. (*with a short laugh*): Well—I suppose that was a silly thing to do.

GERALD (*gravely*): I'm afraid it was, y'know.

KAY: You see, it's Hazel who will have to pay for it.

ROBIN: Well, she needn't. She's only to let me know what he's up to.

JOAN (*surprisingly*): What's the good of talking like that? What could you do? He can make her life a misery, and you couldn't stop it.

MADGE: Well, it's her own fault. I've no patience with her. I wouldn't stand it ten minutes.

JOAN (*with plenty of spirit, for her*): It's no use you talking, Madge. You simply don't understand. You've never been married.

MADGE: No, and after what I've seen here, I think I'm lucky.

MRS. C. (*with energy*): You're not lucky—never were and never will be—and as you haven't the least idea what a woman's real life is like, the less you say the better. You're not among schoolgirls and silly teachers now. Robin, give me a glass of port. Won't you have a drink too?

ROBIN pours her a port and himself another whisky.

GERALD (*rising. He has already put his papers away in case*): I don't think there's any point in my staying any longer.

MRS. C.: But we haven't settled anything.

GERALD (*rather coldly*): I thought there was a chance that Ernest Beevers might have been persuaded to lend you the money. As I don't think anybody else here has three thousand pounds to spare—

ROBIN (*turning on him*): All right, Thornton, you needn't be so damned supercilious about it. Seems to me you've not made a particularly bright job of handling my mother's affairs.

GERALD (*annoyed*): I don't think that comes too well from you.

For years I've given good advice, and never once has it been acted upon. Now I'd be only too delighted to hand over these affairs.

ROBIN: I believe I could make a better job of it myself.

GERALD (*stiffly*): I can't imagine a possible worse choice. (*Moves with his case.*) Good night, Kay. Good night, Alan.

JOAN (*moving*): I think I'll come along too, Gerald.

GERALD and ALAN go out.

ROBIN: You'll be able to have a nice little chat about me on the way.

JOAN stands still now and looks across at him.

JOAN (*very quietly*): It doesn't hurt so much as it used to do, Robin, when you say such bitter things. I suppose one day it won't hurt at all.

ROBIN (*who is sorry at the moment*): Sorry, old girl. And give my love to the kids. Say I'm coming to see them soon.

JOAN: Yes, come and see us soon. Only remember—we're very poor now.

ROBIN: Thanks for that. And then you talk about being bitter.

They look at one another for a moment, lost and hopeless. Then

JOAN moves away, slowly.

KAY (*rather painfully*): Good night, my dear.

JOAN (*painfully turning and producing little social smile*): Good night, Kay. It's been nice—seeing you again.

She goes out. KAY, who is moved, withdraws herself.

ROBIN (*after another drink, an optimist*): Well, now we ought to be able to settle something.

MADGE (*coldly*): So far as I'm concerned, this has simply been a waste of time—and nervous energy.

MRS. C. (*with malice*): You know, Madge, when I think of Gerald Thornton as he is now, a dreary, conceited middle-aged bachelor, I can't help thinking its perhaps a pity you *didn't* marry him.

ROBIN (*with a guffaw*): What, Madge! I never knew you fancied Gerald Thornton.

MRS. C. (*in light but significant tone*): She did—once. Didn't you, dear? And I believe he was interested—oh, a long time ago, when you children were all still at home.

KAY (*sharply*): Mother, if that's not true, then it's stupid silly talk. If it is true, then it's cruel.

MRS. C.: Nonsense! And not so high-and-mighty, please, Kay.

MADGE (*facing them bravely*): It was true, a long time ago, just after the War. When I still thought we could suddenly make everything better for everybody. Socialism! Peace! Universal Brotherhood!

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All that. And I felt then that Gerald Thornton and I together could—help. He had a lot of fine qualities, I thought—I believe he had then, too—and only needed to be pulled out of his rut here, to have his enthusiasm aroused. I was remembering to-night—when I was looking at him. It came back to me quite quickly. (*This last was more to KAY than the other two. Now she takes her mother in.*) One evening—just one evening—and something you did that evening—ruined it all. I'd almost forgotten—but seeing us all here again to-night reminded me—I believe it was at a sort of party for you, Kay. (*Accusingly to her mother.*) Do you remember?

MRS. C.: Really, Madge, you *are* absurd. I seem to remember some piece of nonsense, when we were all being foolish.

MADGE: Yes, you remember. It was quite deliberate on your part. Just to keep a useful young man unattached or jealousy of a girl's possible happiness, or just out of sheer nasty female mischief. . . . And something went for ever. . . .

MRS. C.: It can't have been worth very much then.

MADGE: A seed is easily destroyed, but it might have grown into an oak tree. (*Pauses, looks solemnly at her mother.*) I'm glad I'm not a mother.

MRS. C. (*annoyed*): Yes, you may well say that.

MADGE (*with deadly deliberation*): I know how I'd have despised myself if I'd turned out to be a bad mother.

MRS. C. (*angrily, rising*): So that's what you call me? (*Pauses, then with more vehemence and emotion.*) Just because you never think of anybody but yourselves. All selfish—selfish. Because everything hasn't happened as you wanted it, turn on me—all my fault. You never really think about me. Don't try to see things for a moment from my point of view. When you were children, I was so proud of you all, so confident that you would grow up to be wonderful creatures. I used to see myself at the age I am now, surrounded by you and your own children, so proud of you, so happy with you all, this house happier and gayer even than it was in the best of the old days. And now my life's gone by, and what's happened? You're a resentful soured schoolmistress, middle-aged before your time. Hazel—the loveliest child there ever was—married to a vulgar little bully, and terrified of him. Kay here—gone away to lead her own life, and very bitter and secretive about it, as if she'd failed. Carol—the happiest and kindest of you all—dead before she's twenty. Robin—I know, my dear, I'm not blaming you now, but I must speak the truth for once—with a wife he can't love and no sort of position or comfort or anything. And Alan—the eldest, the boy his father adored, that he thought might do anything—what's he now? (*ALAN has come in now*

and is standing there quietly listening.) A miserable clerk with no prospects, no ambition, no self-respect, a shabby little man that nobody would look at twice. (*She sees him standing there now, but in her worked-up fury does not care, and lashes out at him.*) Yes, a shabby clerk that nobody would look at twice.

KAY (*in a sudden fury of loyalty*): How dare you, Mother, how dare you! Alan of all people!

ALAN (*with a smile*): That's all right, Kay. Don't you get excited. It's not a bad description. I am a shabby little clerk, y'know. It must be very disappointing.

MRS. C.: Oh—don't be so forgiving! Robin, you've always been selfish and weak and a bit of a good-for-nothing—

ROBIN: Here, steady, old girl. I've had some rotten bad luck, too, y'know, and a lot of it's just luck. I've come to see that.

MRS. C. (*exhausted now*): All right—add the bad luck, too, my dear. The point is, whatever they may say about you, Robin my darling, you're my own boy and my own sort, and a great comfort. So you and I will go upstairs and talk.

ROBIN (*as she takes his arm*): That's the spirit!

They move off together.

MADGE (*very quietly*): Mother! (*MRS. C. stops but does not turn.*) We've both said what we want to say. There isn't any more to be said. And if you decide to have any more of these family conferences, don't trouble to ask me to attend them, because I shan't. I don't expect now to see a penny of father's money. And please don't expect to see any of mine.

ROBIN: Who wants yours?

MRS. C.: Come on, my dear, and we'll talk like human beings.

They go out. The other three are quiet and still.

MADGE: I have an idea I wasn't too pleasant to you, Kay, earlier when we met to-night. If so, I'm sorry.

KAY: That's all right, Madge. Are you going back to Collingfield to-night?

MADGE: No, I can't. But I'm staying with Nora Fleming—you remember her? She's Head of Newlingham High now. I've left my things there. I'll go now. I don't want to see mother again.

KAY: Good-bye, Madge. I hope you collar one of these headships.

MADGE: Good-bye, Kay. And do try and write a good book, instead of doing nothing but this useless journalism.

They kiss. MADGE goes off, accompanied by ALAN. KAY, left to herself, shows that she is deeply moved. She moves restlessly, then

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hastily pours herself a whisky and soda, lights a cigarette, tastes the whisky, then sits down, ignores the cigarette burning in her hand and the whisky, stares into the past, and then begins to cry. ALAN returns, filling his pipe.

ALAN (*cheerfully*): You've a good half-hour yet, Kay, before you need set out for the London train. I'll take you to the station. (*Comes up to her.*) What's the matter? Has all this—been a bit too much for you?

KAY (*ruefully*): Apparently. And I thought I was tough now, Alan. . . . See, I was doing the modern working woman—a cigarette and a whisky and soda . . . no good, though. . . . You see, Alan, I've not only been here to-night, I've been here remembering other nights, long ago, when we weren't like this. . . .

ALAN: Yes, I know. Those old Christmasses. . . . birthday parties. . . .

KAY: Yes, I remembered. I saw all of us then. Myself, too. Oh, silly girl of Nineteen Ninteen! Oh, lucky girl!

ALAN: You mustn't mind too much. It's all right, y'know. Like being forty?

KAY: Oh no, Alan, it's hideous and unbearable. Remember what we once were and what we thought we'd be. And now this. And it's all we have, Alan, it's *us*. Every step we've taken—every tick of the clock—making everything worse. If this is all life is, what's the use? Better to die, like Carol, before you find it out, before Time gets to work on you. I've felt it before. Alan, but never as I've done to-night. There's a great devil in the universe, and we call it Time.

ALAN (*playing with his pipe, quietly, shyly*): Did you ever read Blake?

KAY: Yes.

ALAN: Do you remember this? (*quotes quietly, but with feeling*):

Joy and woe are woven fine,
A clothing for the soul divine;
Under every grief and pine
Runs a joy with silken twine.
It is right it should be so;
Man was made for joy and woe;
And when this we rightly know,
Safely through the world we go. . . .

KAY: Safely through the world we go? No, it isn't true, Alan—or it isn't true for me. If things were merely mixed—good and bad—that would be all right, but they get worse. We've seen it to-night. Time's beating us.

ALAN: No, Time's only a kind of dream, Kay. If it wasn't, it would have to destroy everything—the whole universe—and then remake it again every tenth of a second. But Time doesn't destroy anything. It merely moves us on—in this life—from one peep-hole to the next.

KAY: But the happy young Conways, who used to play charades here, they've gone, and gone for ever.

ALAN: No, they're real and existing, just as we two, here now, are real and existing. We're seeing another bit of the view—a bad bit, if you like—but the whole landscape's still there.

KAY: But, Alan, we can't be anything but what we are *now*.

ALAN: No . . . it's hard to explain . . . suddenly like this . . . there's a book I'll lend you—read it in the train. But the point is, now, at this moment, or any moment, we're only a cross-section of our real selves. What we *really* are is the whole stretch of ourselves, all our time, and when we come to the end of this life, all those selves, all our time, will be *us*—the real you, the real me. And then perhaps we'll find ourselves in another time, which is only another kind of dream.

KAY: I'll try to understand . . . so long as you really believe—and think it's possible for me to believe—that Time's not ticking our lives away . . . wrecking . . . and ruining everything . . . for ever. . . .

ALAN: No, it's all right, Kay. I'll get you that book. (*Moves away towards door, then turns.*) You know, I believe half our trouble now is because we think Time's ticking our lives away. That's why we snatch and grab and hurt each other.

KAY: As if we were all in a panic on a sinking ship.

ALAN: Yes, like that.

KAY (*smiling at him*): But you don't do those things—bless you!

ALAN: I think it's easier not to—if you take a long view.

KAY: As if we're—immortal beings?

ALAN (*smiling*): Yes, and in for a tremendous adventure.

Goes out. KAY, comforted, but still brooding, goes to the window and stands there looking out, with head raised. No sooner is she settled there than the curtain comes down.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT III

KAY *is sitting just as we left her at the end of ACT I, and we can still hear MRS. CONWAY singing Schumann's "Der Nussbaum". Nothing happens until the song has ended and we have heard some applause and voices from the party, but then ALAN enters and switches on the lights. We see that the room and everything in it is exactly as they were before. Only KAY herself has changed. Something—elusive, a brief vision, a score of shadowy presentiments—is haunting her. She is deeply disturbed. She throws a look or two at the room, as if she had just seen it in some other guise. She looks at ALAN, puzzled. He grins and rubs his hands a little.*

ALAN: Well, Kay?

KAY *(as if to break into something important)*: Alan—— *(Breaks off.)*

ALAN: Yes?

KAY *(hurriedly)*: No—nothing.

ALAN *(looking more closely at her)*: I believe you've been asleep—while mother was singing.

KAY *(confusedly)*: No. I was sitting here—listening. I turned the light out. No, I didn't fall asleep—I don't know, perhaps I did—just for a second. It couldn't have been longer.

ALAN: You'd know if you'd been asleep.

KAY *(looking about her, slowly)*: No, I wasn't asleep. But—quite suddenly—I thought I saw . . . we were. . . . Anyhow, you came into it, I think, Alan.

ALAN *(amused and puzzled)*: Came into what?

KAY: I can't remember. And I know I was listening to mother singing all the time. I'm—a bit—wuzzy.

ALAN: Most of the people are going now. You'd better go and say good night.

HAZEL *enters, carrying plate on which is enormous piece of sticky, rich, creamy cake. She has already begun to tackle this as she moves in.*

KAY *(seeing her)*: Hazel, you greedy pig!

KAY *defly swoops up a bit of the cake and eats it.*

HAZEL *(talking with her mouth rather full)*: I didn't come in here just to eat this.

ACT III TIME AND THE CONWAYS

KAY: Course you did!

HAZEL: They're all saying good night now, and I'm dodging that little horror Gerald Thornton brought.

KAY (*hastily*): I must say my piece to them.

Hurries off. ALAN lingers.

ALAN (*after a pause*): Hazel!

HAZEL (*mouth full*): Um?

ALAN (*with elaborate air of casualness*): What's Joan Helford going to do now?

HAZEL: Oh—just mooch round a bit.

ALAN: I thought I heard her saying she was going away—I was wondering if she was leaving Newlingham.

HAZEL: She's only going to stay with her aunt. Joan's always staying with aunts. Why can't we have aunts planted all over the place?

ALAN: There's Aunt Edith.

HAZEL: And a doctor's house in Wolverhampton! Ghastly! (*Quick change of tone. Teasingly.*) Anything else you'd like to know about Joan?

ALAN (*confused*): No—no. I—just wondered. (*Turns to go and almost bumps into ERNEST, who is wearing a very shabby mackintosh-raincoat and carrying a bowler hat. As soon as HAZEL sees who it is, she turns away and has another dab at her cake. ALAN stops and so does ERNEST.*) Oh!—you going?

ERNEST (*a man who knows his own mind*): In a minute. (*He obviously waits for ALAN to clear out.*)

ALAN (*rather confused*): Yes—well—— (*Makes a move.*)

HAZEL (*loudly and clearly*): Alan, you're not going?

She looks across, completely ignoring ERNEST, who waits, not perhaps quite as cool as he would appear on the surface, for the hat he is clutching moves a bit.

ALAN (*not at home in this*): Yes—have to say good night and get their coats and things—you know——

Goes out. HAZEL attends to her cake, and then looks, without a smile, at ERNEST.

ERNEST: I just looked in to say good night, Miss Conway.

HAZEL (*blankly*): Oh—yes—of course. Well——

ERNEST (*cutting in*): It's been a great pleasure to me to come here and meet you all.

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He waits a moment. She finds herself compelled to speak.

HAZEL (*same tone*): Oh—well——

ERNEST (*cutting in again*): Especially you. I'm new round here, y'know. I've only been in the place about three months. I bought a share in that paper mill—Eckersley's—out at West Newlingham—you know it?

HAZEL (*no encouragement from her*): No.

ERNEST: Thought you might have noticed it. Been there long enough. Matter of fact it wants rebuilding. But that's where I am. And I hadn't been here a week before I noticed you, Miss Conway.

HAZEL (*who knows it only too well*): Did you?

ERNEST: Yes. And I've been watching out for you ever since. I expect you've noticed me knocking about.

HAZEL (*loftily*): No, I don't think I have.

ERNEST: Oh—yes—you must have done. Come on now. Admit it.

HAZEL (*her natural self coming out now*): Well, if you must know, I have noticed you——

ERNEST (*pleased*): I thought so.

HAZEL (*rapidly and indignantly*): Because I thought you behaved very stupidly and rudely. If you want to look silly yourself—that's your affair—but you'd no right to make me look silly too——

ERNEST (*rather crushed*): Oh! I didn't know—it'd been as bad as that——

HAZEL (*feeling she has the upper hand*): Well, it has.

He stares at her, perhaps having moved a little closer. She does not look at him at first, but then is compelled to meet his hard stare. There is something about this look that penetrates to the essential weakness of her character.

ERNEST (*coming up again now*): I'm sorry. Though I can't see anybody's much the worse for it. After all, we've only one life to live, let's get on with it, I say. And in my opinion, you're the best-looking girl in this town, Miss Hazel Conway. I've been telling you that—in my mind—for the last two months. But I knew it wouldn't be long before I got to know you. To tell you properly. (*Looks hard at her. She does not like him but is completely helpless before this direct attack. He nods slowly.*) I expect you're thinking I'm not much of a chap. But there's a bit more in me than meets the eye. A few people have found that out already, and a lot more'll find it out before so long—here in Newlingham. You'll see. (*Changes his tone, because he is uncertain on purely social matters, almost humble now.*) Would it be all right—if I—sort of—called to see you—some time soon?

HAZEL (*coming to the top again*): You'd better ask my mother.

ERNEST (*jocularly*): Oh!—sort of *Ask Mamma* business, eh?

HAZEL (*confused and annoyed*): No—I didn't mean it like that at all. I meant that this is mother's house——

ERNEST: Yes, but you're old enough now to have your own friends, aren't you?

HAZEL: I don't make friends with people very quickly.

ERNEST (*with appalling bluntness*): Oh! I'd heard you did.

HAZEL (*haughtily, angrily*): Do you mean to say you've been discussing me with people?

ERNEST: Yes. Why not?

They stare at one another, ERNEST coolly and deliberately and HAZEL with attempted hauteur, when MADGE and ROBIN enter together, in the middle of a talk.

ROBIN (*who is in great form*): Golly yes! It was a great lark. We weren't in uniform, y'know. I did some stoking. Hard work, but a great stunt.

MADGE (*hotly*): It wasn't. You ought to have been ashamed of yourselves.

ROBIN (*surprised*): Why?

MADGE: Because helping to break a strike and being a blackleg isn't a lark and a stunt. Those railwaymen were desperately anxious to improve their conditions. They didn't go on strike for fun. It was a very serious thing for them and for their wives and families. And then people like you, Robin, think it's amusing when you try to do their work and make the strike useless. I think it's shameful the way the middle classes turn against the working class.

ROBIN (*rather out of his depth now*): But there had to be some sort of train service.

MADGE: Why? If the public had to do without trains altogether, they might realise then that the railwaymen have some grievances.

ERNEST (*sardonically*): They might. But I've an idea they'd be too busy with their own grievance—no trains. And you only want a few more railway strikes and then half their traffic will be gone for ever, turned into road transport. And what do your clever railwaymen do then? (*Pauses. MADGE is listening, of course, but not quite acknowledging that he had any right to join in.*) And another thing. The working class is out for itself. Then why shouldn't the middle class be out for itself?

MADGE (*coldly*): Because the middle class must have already been "out for itself"—as you call it——

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ERNEST: Well, what do you call it? Something in Latin?

MADGE (*with chill impatience*): I say, the middle class must have already been successfully out for itself or it wouldn't be a comfortable middle class. Then why turn against the working class when at last *it* tries to look after itself?

ERNEST (*cynically*): That's easy. There's only so much to go round, and if you take more, then I get less.

MADGE (*rather sharply*): I'm sorry, but that's bad economics as well as bad ethics.

ROBIN (*bursting out*): But we'd have Red Revolution—like Russia—if we began to listen to these wild chaps like this J. H. Thomas.

HAZEL (*moving*): Well, I think it's all silly. Why can't people agree?

ERNEST (*seeing her going*): Oh!—Miss Conway——

HAZEL (*her very blank sweetness a snub*): Oh—yes—good night.

She goes out. ERNEST looks after her, a rather miserable figure. Then he looks towards ROBIN just in time to catch a grin on his face before it is almost—but not quite—wiped off.

MADGE (*to ROBIN*): I came in here for something. What was it?

Looks about her and through ERNEST, whom she obviously dislikes.

ROBIN (*still a grin lurking*): Don't ask me.

MADGE goes, ignoring ERNEST, though rather absently than pointedly. ROBIN still looking vaguely mocking, lights a cigarette.

ROBIN (*casually*): Were you in the army?

ERNEST: Yes. Two years.

ROBIN: What crush?

ERNEST: Army Pay Corps.

ROBIN (*easily, not too rudely*): That must have been fun for you.

ERNEST looks as if he is going to make an angry retort when CAROL hurries in.

CAROL: Mr. Beevers—— (*As he turns, looking rather sullen, ROBIN wanders out.*) Oh!—you look Put Out.

ERNEST (*grimly*): That's about it. Put out!

CAROL (*looking hard at him*): I believe you're all hot and angry inside, aren't you?

ERNEST (*taking it as lightly as he can*): Or disappointed. Which is it?

CAROL: A mixture, I expect. Well, Mr. Beevers, you mustn't. You were very nice about the charade—and very good in it too—and I don't suppose you've ever played before, have you?

ERNEST: No. (*Grimly.*) They didn't go in for those sort of things in my family.

CAROL (*looking at him critically*): No, I don't think you've had enough Fun. That's your trouble, Mr. Beevers. You must come and play charades again.

ERNEST (*as if setting her apart from the others*): You're all right, y'know.

MRS. C.'s voice, very clear, is heard off saying, "But surely he's gone, hasn't he?"

CAROL: We're all all right, you know. And don't forget that, Mr. Beevers.

ERNEST (*liking her*): You're a funny kid.

CAROL (*severely*): I'm not very funny and I'm certainly not a kid——

ERNEST: Oh—sorry!

CAROL (*serenely*): I'll forgive you this time.

MRS. C. enters with GERALD. She looks rather surprised to see ERNEST still there. He notices this.

ERNEST (*awkwardly*): I'm just going, Mrs. Conway. (*To GERALD.*) You coming along?

MRS. C. (*smoothly, but quickly in*): No, Mr. Thornton and I want to talk business for a few minutes.

ERNEST: I see. Well, good night, Mrs. Conway. And I'm very pleased to have met you.

MRS. C. (*condescendingly gracious*): Good night, Mr. Beevers. Carol, will you——

CAROL (*cheerfully*): Yes. (*To ERNEST, who looks rather bewildered by it, in imitation Western American accent.*) I'll set you and your hoss on the big trail, pardner.

She and ERNEST go out. MRS. C. and GERALD watch them go. Then GERALD turns and raises his eyebrows at her. MRS. C. shakes her head. We hear a door slammed to.

MRS. C. (*briskly*): I'm sorry if your little friend thought he was being pushed out, but really, Gerald, the children would never have forgiven me if I'd encouraged him to stay any longer.

GERALD: I'm afraid Beevers hasn't been a success.

MRS. C.: Well, after all, he is—rather—isn't he?

GERALD: I did warn you, y'know. And really he was so desperately keen to meet the famous Conways.

MRS. C.: Hazel, you mean.

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GERALD: Hazel, especially, but he was determined to know the whole family.

MRS. C.: Well, I do think they're an attractive lot of children.

GERALD: Only outshone by their attractive mother.

MRS. C. (*delighted*): Gerald! I believe you're going to flirt with me.

GERALD (*who isn't*): Of course I am. By the way, there *wasn't* any business you wanted to discuss, was there?

MRS. C.: No, not really. But I think you ought to know I've had another *enormous* offer for this house. Of course I wouldn't dream of selling it, but it's nice to know it's worth so much. Oh!—and young George Farrow would like me to sell him my share in the firm, and says he's ready to make an offer that would surprise me.

GERALD: I believe it would be pretty handsome too. But, of course, there's no point in selling out when they're paying fifteen per cent. And once we're really out of this war-time atmosphere and the government restrictions are off, there's going to be a tremendous boom.

MRS. C.: Isn't that lovely? All the children back home, and plenty of money to help them to settle down. And, mind you, Gerald, I shouldn't be a bit surprised if Robin doesn't do awfully well in some business quite soon. *Selling things*, probably—people find him so attractive. Dear Robin! (*Pauses. Then change of tone, more depth and feeling.*) Gerald, it isn't so very long ago that I thought myself the unluckiest woman in the world. If it hadn't been for the children, I wouldn't have wanted to go on living. Sometimes—without *him*—I didn't want to go on living. And now—though, of course, it'll never be the same without *him*—I suddenly feel I'm one of the luckiest women in the world. All my children round me, quite safe at last, very happy. (*ROBIN'S voice, shouting, off, "It's hide and seek all over the house."*) Did he say "all over the house"?

GERALD: Yes.

MRS. C. (*calling*): Not in my room, Robin, please.

ROBIN (*off, shouting*): Mother's room's barred.

JOAN'S VOICE (*further off, shouting*): Who's going to be it?

ROBIN'S VOICE (*off*): I am. Mother, come on. Where's Gerald?

MRS. C. (*as she prepares to move*): Just to hear him shouting about the house again—you don't know what it means to me, Gerald. And you never will know.

They go out. As MRS. C. passes switch, she can switch off half the lights in the room, perhaps leaving right half unilluminated and perhaps standard lamp on left half.

ROBIN'S VOICE (*loud, off*): I'll go into the coat cupboard and count fifty. Now then—scatter.

After a moment JOAN enters, happy and breathless, and after looking about chooses a hiding-place to the right—behind a chair, end of bookcase or sofa, or curtain. No sooner has she installed herself than ALAN enters and moves across to that end. She peeps out and sees him.

JOAN (*imploring whisper*): Oh—Alan—don't hide in here.

ALAN (*humbly*): I came specially. I saw you come in.

JOAN: No, please. Go somewhere else.

ALAN (*wistfully*): You look so pretty, Joan.

JOAN: Do I? That's sweet of you, Alan.

ALAN: Can I stay, then?

JOAN: No, please. It's *so* much more fun if you go somewhere else. Alan, don't spoil it.

ALAN: Spoil what?

JOAN (*very hurriedly*): The game—of course. Go on, Alan, there's a pet. Oh—you can't go out that way now. You'll have to go out of the window and then round. Go on.

ALAN: All right. (*Climbs out of window, then looks closely at her a moment, then softly.*) Good-bye, Joan.

JOAN (*whispering, surprised*): Why do you say that?

ALAN (*very sadly*): Because I feel it is good-bye.

ROBIN'S voice, humming, is heard off. ALAN goes through the curtains at the window. ROBIN, half humming, half singing, a popular song of the period, enters slowly. He moves to the edge of the lighted half, looking about him, still singing. Finally he turns away and begins to move, when JOAN joins in the song softly from her hiding-place.

ROBIN (*with satisfaction*): A-ha! (*Very quickly he closes the curtains, but as he turns his back, JOAN reaches out and turns off the switch of the standard lamp in her corner. The room is now almost in darkness.*) All right, Joan Helford. Where are you, Joan Helford, where are you? (*She is heard to laugh in the darkness.*) You can't escape, Joan Helford, you can't escape. No, no. No, no. No escape for little Joan. No escape.

They run round the room, then she goes to the window and stands on the seat. He pulls her down, and then, in silhouette against the moonlight we see them embrace and kiss.

JOAN (*really moved*): Oh—Robin!

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ROBIN (*mocking, but nicely*): Oh—Joan!

JOAN (*shyly*): I suppose—you've been—doing this—to dozens of girls?

ROBIN (*still light*): Yes, Joan, dozens.

JOAN (*looking up at him*): I thought so.

ROBIN (*a trifle unsteadily*): Like that, Joan. But not—like this—

Now he kisses her with more ardour.

JOAN (*deeply moved, but still shy*): Robin—you are sweet.

ROBIN (*after pause*): You know, Joan, although it's not so very long since I saw you last, I couldn't believe my eyes to-night—you looked so stunning.

JOAN: It was because I'd just heard that you'd come back, Robin.

ROBIN (*who does*): I don't believe it.

JOAN (*sincerely*): Yes, it's true—honestly—I don't suppose you've ever thought about me, have you?

ROBIN (*who hasn't*): Yes, I have. Hundreds of times.

JOAN: I have about you too.

ROBIN (*kissing her*): Joan, you're a darling!

JOAN (*after pause, whispering*): Do you remember that morning you went away so early—a year ago?

ROBIN: Yes. But you weren't there. Only mother and Hazel and Kay.

JOAN: I was there too, but I didn't let any of you see me.

ROBIN (*genuinely surprised*): You got up at that filthy hour just to see me go?

JOAN (*simply*): Yes, of course. Oh—it was awful—trying to hide and trying not to cry, all at the same time.

ROBIN (*still surprised and moved*): But Joan, I'd no idea.

JOAN (*very shyly*): I didn't mean to give myself away.

ROBIN (*embracing her*): But Joan—oh gosh—it's marvellous.

JOAN: You don't love me?

ROBIN (*now sure he does*): Of course I do. Golly, this is great! Joan, we'll have a scrumptious time!

JOAN (*solemnly*): Yes, let's. But Robin—it's terribly *serious*, y'know.

ROBIN: Oh—yes—don't think I don't feel that, too. But that's no reason why we shouldn't enjoy ourselves, is it?

JOAN (*crying out*): No, no, no. Let's be happy for ever and ever.

They embrace fervently, silhouetted against the moonlit window. Now the curtains are suddenly drawn by CAROL, who sees them and calls out to people behind her.

CAROL (*with a sort of cheerful disgust*): I thought so! They're in here—*Courting!* I knew there was a catch in this hide-and-seek.

ROBIN and JOAN *spring apart but still hold hands as CAROL switches on all the lights and comes into the room, followed by MADGE and GERALD. MADGE is rather excited—and rather untidy, too, as if she had been hiding in some difficult place.*

ROBIN (*grinning*): Sorry! Shall we start again?

MADGE (*crossing towards window*): No, thank you, Robin.

CAROL: You'd better explain to mother. I'm going to make tea.

She goes. ROBIN and JOAN look at one another, then go out.

GERALD *watches MADGE, who now draws the curtains and then returns to him.*

GERALD: Well, Madge, it sounds all right. And I know Lord Robert Cecil's a fine chap. But I don't quite see where I come into it.

MADGE: Because in a few weeks' time there'll be a branch of this League of Nations Union here in Newlingham. It's no use my doing much about it—though I'll join, of course—because I'll be away. But you could be organising secretary or something, Gerald.

GERALD: Don't know that I'd be much good.

MADGE: You'd be perfect. You understand business. You know how to handle people. You'd make a good public speaker. Oh, Gerald—you're maddening!

GERALD (*smiling, not without affection*): Why, Madge? What have I done now?

MADGE: We're friends, aren't we?

GERALD: I consider you one of my very best friends, Madge, and I hope I'm not flattering myself.

MADGE (*warmly*): Of course not.

GERALD (*smiling*): Good! So?

MADGE: You're not doing enough, Gerald.

GERALD (*mildly*): I'm kept pretty busy, y'know.

MADGE: Yes, I don't mean you're lazy—though I'm not sure that you aren't a bit, y'know, Gerald—I mean you're not doing enough with yourself. You're not *using* yourself to the utmost. I could be *tremendously* proud of you, Gerald.

GERALD: That's—almost overwhelming—coming from you, Madge.

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MADGE: Why from me?

GERALD: Because I know very well that you've got a very good brain and are a most critical young woman. Rather frightening.

MADGE (*rather more feminine here*): Nonsense! You don't mean that. I'd much rather you didn't, y'know.

GERALD: All right, I don't. As a matter of fact, I'm very fond of you, Madge, but don't often get a chance of showing you that I am.

MADGE (*lighting up at this*): I've always been fond of you, Gerald, and that's why I say I could be tremendously proud of you. (*With more breadth and sweep and real warm enthusiasm.*) We're going to build up a new world now. This horrible War was probably necessary because it was a great bonfire on which we threw all the old nasty rubbish of the world. Civilisation can really begin—at last. People have learned their lesson——

GERALD (*dubiously*): I hope so.

MADGE: Oh—Gerald—don't be so pessimistic, so cynical——

GERALD: Sorry, but a lawyer—even a young one—sees a lot of human nature in his office. There's a procession of people with their quarrels and grievances. And sometimes I wonder how much people are capable of learning.

MADGE: That's because you have to deal with some of the stupidest. But *the* people—all over the world—have learned their lesson. You'll see. No more piling up armaments. No more wars. No more hate and intolerance and violence. Oh—Gerald—I believe that when we look back—in twenty years time—we'll be staggered at the progress that's been made. Because things happen quickly now——

GERALD: That's true enough.

MADGE (*begins to orate a little, sincerely*): And so is all the rest. Under the League, we'll build up a new commonwealth of all the nations, so that they can live at peace for ever. And Imperialism will go. And so in the end, of course, will Capitalism. There'll be no more booms and slumps and panics and strikes and lock-outs, because the people themselves, led by the best brains in their countries, will possess both the political and economic power. There'll be Socialism at last, a free, prosperous, happy people, all enjoying equal opportunities, living at peace with the whole world. (*Quotes with great fervour and sincerity.*)

Bring me my bow of burning gold:
Bring me my Arrows of desire:
Bring me my Spear: O clouds unfold!
Bring me my Chariot of fire.

I will not cease from Mental Fight,
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant Land . . .

GERALD (*genuinely moved by her fervour*): Madge—you're inspired to-night. I—I hardly recognise you—you're——

MADGE (*warmly, happily*): This is the real me. Oh!—Gerald—in this New World we're going to build up now, men and women won't play a silly little game of cross-purposes any longer. They'll go forward together—sharing everything——

MRS. C. *enters with* HAZEL. MADGE *breaks off, looking rather untidy*. GERALD, *who has been genuinely dominated by her, looks round, recovering himself*.

MRS. C. (*with maddening maternal briskness*): Madge dear, your hair's all over the place, you've made your nose all shiny, you're horribly untidy, and I'm sure you're in the middle of a Socialist speech that must be boring poor Gerald.

The generous mood is shattered. MADGE might have been hit in the face. She looks at her mother, then looks quickly at GERALD, reads something in his face—a sort of withdrawal from her—that is somehow final, and then in complete silence walks straight out of the room.

MRS. C. (*lightly, but knowing what has happened*): Poor Madge!

HAZEL (*with sudden reproach*): Mother!

MRS. C. (*with wide innocence*): What, Hazel?

HAZEL (*significantly, indicating GERALD*): You know!

GERALD (*not half the man he was*): I think—I'd better be going.

MRS. C.: Oh—no, Gerald, don't go. Kay and Carol are making some tea and we're all going to be nice and cosy together in here.

GERALD: I fancy it's rather late, though. (*Glances at his watch, while HAZEL slips out.*) After eleven. I *must* go. I've an early appointment in the morning, and one or two things to look through before I turn in to-night. So—— (*With slight smile. KAY enters with folding legs of small Oriental table. She puts them down, to turn to GERALD, and MRS. CONWAY arranges them.*) Good night, Kay. Thank you for a very nice party. And now that you're properly grown-up, I hope you'll be happy.

KAY (*with a slight smile*): Thank you, Gerald. Do you think I will?

GERALD (*his smile suddenly vanishing*): I don't know, Kay. I really don't know.

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Smiles again and shakes hands. Nods and smiles at HAZEL, who enters with tray of tea things.

MRS. C.: No. I'll see you out, Gerald.

They go out. HAZEL and KAY can rearrange things a little while talking.

HAZEL (*thoughtfully*): I've always thought it must be much more *fun* being a girl than being a man.

KAY: I'm never sure. Sometimes men seem quite hopelessly dull, like creatures made out of wood. And then at other times they seem to have all the fun.

HAZEL (*very seriously for her*): Kay, just now—this very minute—I wish I wasn't a girl. I'd like to be a man—one of those men with red faces and loud voices who just don't care what anybody says about them.

KAY (*laughingly*): Perhaps they do, though.

HAZEL: I'd like to be one of those who don't.

KAY: Why all this?

HAZEL shakes her head. CAROL and ALAN enter with the rest of the tea things.

CAROL: Alan says he wants to go to bed.

KAY: Oh—no, Alan. Don't spoil it.

ALAN: How could I?

KAY: By going to bed. It's my birthday, and you're not to leave us until I say you can.

CAROL (*severely*): Quite right, Kay. (*Going up to ALAN.*) And that's because we're very very fond of you, Alan, though you are such a chump. You must smoke your pipe too—for cosiness. (*Generally.*) Robin and Joan are courting in the dining-room now. I can see they're going to be an awful nuisance.

KAY (*as HAZEL and CAROL settle down*): If you had to fall in love with somebody, would you like it to be at home or somewhere else?

HAZEL: Somewhere else. Too ordinary at home. On a yacht or the terrace at Monte Carlo or a Pacific Island. Marvellous!

CAROL: That would be using up too many things at once. Greedy stuff!

HAZEL (*coolly*): I *am* greedy.

CAROL: I should think so. (*To the other two.*) Yesterday morning, she was in the bath, reading *Greenmantle*, and eating nut-milk chocolate.

KAY (*who has been thinking*): No, it wouldn't be too ordinary,

falling in love at home here. It would be best, I think. Suppose you were suddenly unhappy. It would be awful to be desperately unhappy and in love miles away in a strange house. . . . (*Suddenly stops, shivers.*)

CAROL: Kay, what's the matter?

KAY: Nothing.

CAROL: Then it must have been a goose walking over your grave.

KAY abruptly turns away from them, going towards the window.

HAZEL looks at her—as the other two do—then raises her eyebrows at CAROL, who shakes her head sternly. MRS. C. enters and looks cheerful at the sight of the tea.

MRS. C. (*cheerfully*): Now then, let's have some tea and be nice and cosy together. Where's Robin?

HAZEL: Spooning with Joan in the dining-room.

MRS. C.: Oh!—hasn't Joan gone yet? I really think she might leave us to ourselves now. After all, it's the first time we've all been together in this house for—how long? It must be at least three years. I'll pour out. Come on, Kay. What's the matter?

CAROL (*in tremendous whisper, seriously*): Sh! It's a Mood.

But KAY returns, looking rather strained. Her mother looks at her carefully, smiling. KAY manages an answering smile.

MRS. C.: That's better, darling. What a funny child you are, aren't you?

KAY: Not really, Mother. Where's Madge?

ALAN: She went upstairs.

MRS. C.: Go up, dear, and tell her we're all in here, with some tea, and ask her—very nicely, dear, specially from me—to come down.

HAZEL (*muttering, rather*): I'll bet she's doesn't.

ALAN goes. MRS. C. begins pouring out tea.

MRS. C.: This is just like old times, isn't it? And we seem to have waited so long. I ought to tell fortunes again—to-night.

HAZEL (*eagerly*): Oh—yes—Mother, do.

KAY (*rather sharply*): No.

MRS. C.: Kay! Really! Have you had too much excitement to-day?

KAY: No, I don't think so. Sorry, Mother. Somehow, I hated the idea of you messing about with those cards to-night. I never did like it much.

CAROL (*solemnly*): I believe only the Bad Things come true.

MRS. C.: Certainly not. I clearly saw Madge's Girton scholarship, you remember. I said she was going to get one, didn't I? And I

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always said Robin and Alan would come back. I saw it every time in the cards.

Enter JOAN and ROBIN.

JOAN: I—I think I ought to go now, Mrs. Conway. (*To KAY, impulsively.*) Thank you so much, Kay, it's been the loveliest party there ever was. (*Suddenly kisses her with great affection, then she looks solemnly at MRS. C. who is considering the situation.*) I really have had a marvellous time, Mrs. Conway.

Standing close to her now. MRS. C. looks quite searchingly at her. JOAN meets her look quite bravely, though a little shaky.

ROBIN: Well, Mother?

MRS. C. looks at him, then at JOAN, and suddenly smiles. JOAN smiles back.

MRS. C.: Are you two children *serious*?

ROBIN (*boisterously*): Of course we are.

MRS. C.: Joan?

JOAN (*very solemnly, nervously*): Yes.

MRS. C. (*with an air of capitulation*): I think you'd better have a cup of tea, hadn't you?

JOAN flings her arms round MRS. C. and kisses her excitedly.

JOAN: I'm so happy.

CAROL (*loudly, cheerfully*): Tea. Tea. Tea.

Passing of cups, etc. ALAN enters.

ALAN: Madge says she's too tired, Mother.

Goes and sits down near KAY.

MRS. C.: Well, I think we can get on very nicely without Madge. Kay ought to read us some of the new novel she's writing——

Exclamations of agreement and approval from JOAN and ROBIN and a groan from HAZEL.

KAY (*in horror*): I couldn't possibly, Mother.

MRS. C.: I can't see why not. You always expect me to be ready to sing for you.

KAY: That's different.

MRS. C. (*mostly to ROBIN and JOAN*): Kay's always so solemn and secretive about her writing—as if she were ashamed of it.

KAY (*bravely*): I am—in a way. I know it's not good enough yet. Most of it's stupid, stupid, *stupid*.

CAROL (*indignantly*): It isn't, Kay.

KAY: Yes, it is, angel. But it won't always be. It *must* come right if I only keep on trying. And then—you'll see.

JOAN: Is that what you want to do, Kay? Just to write novels and things?

KAY: Yes. But there's nothing in simply writing. The point is to be *good*—to be sensitive and sincere. Hardly anybody's both, especially women who write. But I'm going to try and be. And whatever happens, I'm never *never* going to write except what I want to write, what I feel is true to me, deep down. I won't write just to please silly people or just to make money. I'll—

But she suddenly breaks off, The rest wait and stare.

ALAN (*encouragingly*): Go on, Kay.

KAY (*confusedly, dejectedly*): No—Alan—I'd finished really—or if I was going to say something else, I've forgotten what it was—nothing much—

MRS. C. (*not too concernedly*): You're sure you're not over-tired, Kay?

KAY (*hastily*): No, Mother. Really.

MRS. C.: I wonder what will have happened to you, Hazel, when Kay's a famous novelist? Perhaps one of your majors and captains will come back for you soon.

HAZEL (*calmly*): They needn't. In fact, I'd rather none of them did.

ROBIN (*teasingly*): Thinks she can do much better than them.

HAZEL (*calmly*): I know I can. I shall marry a tall, rather good-looking man about five or six years older than I am, and he'll have plenty of money and be very fond of travel, and we'll go all over the world together but have a house in London.

MRS. C.: And what about poor Newlingham?

HAZEL: Mother, I couldn't possibly spend the rest of my life here. I'd die. But you shall come and stay with us in London, and we'll give parties so that people can come and stare at my sister, Kay Conway, the famous novelist.

ROBIN (*boisterously*): And what about your brother, Robin, the famous—oh! famous something-or-other, you bet your life.

JOAN (*rather teasingly*): You don't know what you're going to do yet, Robin.

ROBIN (*grandly*): Well, give me a chance. I've only been out of the Air Force about twelve hours. But—by jingo—I'm going to do *something*. And none of this starting-at-the-bottom-of-the-ladder, pushing-a-pen-in-a-corner business either. This is a time when young men get a chance, and I'm going to take it. You watch.

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MRS. C. (*with mock alarm, though with underlying seriousness*): Don't tell me you're going to run away from Newlingham, too!

ROBIN (*grandly*): Oh—well—I don't know about that yet, Mother. I might make a start here—there's some money in the place, thanks to some jolly rotten profiteering, and we're pretty well known here, so that would help—but I don't guarantee to take root in Newlingham, no fear! Don't be surprised, Hazel, if I'm in London before you. Or even before you, Kay. *And making plenty of money.* (*To HAZEL.*) Perhaps more than this tall, good-looking chap of yours will be making.

CAROL (*sharply, pointing*): Hazel will always have plenty of money.

MRS. C. (*amused*): How do you know, Carol?

CAROL: I just do. It came over me suddenly then.

MRS. C. (*still amused*): Well now! I thought I was the prophetic one of the family. I suppose it wouldn't be fair if I sent my rival to bed.

CAROL: I should jolly well think it wouldn't. And I'll tell you another thing. (*Points suddenly at ALAN.*) Alan's the happy one.

ROBIN: Good old Alan!

ALAN: I—rather think—you're wrong there, y'know, Carol.

CAROL: I'm not. I *know*.

MRS. C.: Now I'm not going to have this. I'm the one who *knows* in this family. Now wait a minute. (*Closes her eyes, then half playfully, half seriously.*) Yes. I see Robin dashing about, making lots of money and becoming very important and helping some of you others. And a very devoted young wife by his side. And Hazel, of course, being very grand. And her husband *is* tall and *quite* good-looking, nearly as good-looking as she thinks he is. I believe he comes into a title.

ROBIN: Snob!

MRS. C.: I don't see Madge marrying, but then she'll be headmistress of a big school quite soon, and then she'll become one of these women who are on all sorts of committees and have to go up to London to give evidence, and so becomes happy and grand that way.

ROBIN: I'll bet she will, too, good old Madge!

MRS. C. (*gaily*): I'll go and stay with her sometimes—*very* important, the headmistress's mother—and the other mistresses will be invited in to dine and will listen *very* respectfully while I tell them about my other children——

MRS. C. (*same vein*): Then there's Carol. Well, of course, Carol will be here with me for years yet——

CAROL (*excitedly*): I don't know about that. I haven't exactly decided *what* to do yet, there are so many things to do.

JOAN: Oh—Carol—I think you could go on the stage.

CAROL (*with growing excitement*): Yes, I could, of course, and I've often thought of it. But I shouldn't want to be on the stage *all* the time—and when I wasn't playing a part, I'd like to be painting pictures—just for myself, y'know—daubing like mad—with lots and lots and lots of the very brightest paint—tubes and tubes of vermilion and royal blue and emerald green and gamboge and cobalt and Chinese white. And then making all kinds of weird dresses for myself. And scarlet cloaks. And black crêpe-de-Chine gowns with orange dragons all over them. And cooking! Yes, doing sausages and gingerbread and pancakes. And sitting on the top of mountains and going down rivers in canoes. And making friends with all sorts of people. And I'd share a flat or a little house with Kay in London, and Alan would come to stay with us and smoke his pipe, and we'd talk about books and laugh at *ridiculous* people, and then go to foreign countries——

ROBIN (*calling through*): Hoy, hoy, steady!

MRS. C. (*affectionately amused*): How are you going to *begin* doing all that, you ridiculous child!

CAROL (*excitedly*): I'd get it all in somehow. The point is—to live. Never mind about money and positions and husbands with titles and rubbish—I'm *going to live*.

MRS. C. (*who has now caught the infection*): All right, darling. But wherever you were, all of you, and whatever you were doing, you'd all come back here sometimes, wouldn't you? I'd come and see you, but you'd all come and see me, too, all together, perhaps with wives and husbands and lovely children of your own, not being rich and famous or anything but just being yourselves, as you are now, enjoying our silly old jokes, sometimes playing the same silly old games, all one big happy family. I can see us all here again——

KAY (*a terrible cry*): Don't!

She is standing, deeply moved. The others stare in silent consternation.

MRS. C.: But what is it, Kay?

KAY, *still moved, shakes her head. The others exchange puzzled glances, but CAROL hurries across, all tenderness, and puts an arm*

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you wherever you go. I won't leave you ever if you don't want me to. I'll look after you, darling.

KAY *stops crying. She looks—half-smiling—at CAROL in a puzzled, wistful fashion. CAROL goes back to her mother's side.*

MRS. C. (*reproachful but affectionate*): Really, Kay! What's the matter?

KAY *shakes her head, then looks very earnestly at ALAN.*

KAY (*struggling with some thought*): Alan . . . please tell me. . . . I can't bear it . . . and there's something . . . something . . . you could tell me. . . .

ALAN (*troubled, bewildered*): I'm sorry, Kay. I don't understand. What is it?

KAY: Something you know—that would make it different—not so hard to bear. Don't you know yet?

ALAN (*stammering*): No—I don't—understand.

KAY: Oh—hurry, hurry, Alan—and then—tell me—and comfort me. Something—of Blake's—came into it—— (*Looks hard at him, then struggling, remembers, saying brokenly*):

Joy . . . and woe . . . are woven fine,
A clothing for the . . . soul divine. . . .

I used to know that verse, too. What was it at the end? (*Remembers, as before*):

And, when this . . . we rightly know,
Safely through the world we go.

Safely . . . through the world we go. . . .

Looks like breaking down again, but recovers herself.

MRS. C. (*almost a whisper*): Over-excitement. I might have known. (*To KAY, firmly, cheerfully.*) Kay, darling, all this birthday excitement's been too much. You'd better go to bed now, dear, and Carol shall bring you some hot milk. Perhaps an aspirin, too, eh? (*KAY, recovering from her grief, shakes her head.*) You're all right now, aren't you, darling?

KAY (*in muffled voice*): Yes, Mother, I'm all right.

But she turns and goes to the window, pulling back the curtains and looking out.

MRS. C.: I know what might help, it did once before. Robin, come with me.

ACT III TIME AND THE CONWAYS

JOAN (*rather helplessly*): I ought to go, oughtn't I?

MRS. C.: No, stay a few minutes, Joan. Robin.

She and ROBIN go out.

CAROL (*whispering as she moves*): She's going to sing, and I know what it will be.

CAROL switches out the lights and returns to sit with HAZEL and JOAN, the three girls making a group, dimly but warmly lit by the light coming in from the hall. Very softly there comes the opening bars of Brahms' "Wiegenlied". ALAN joins KAY at the window, so that his face, too, like hers, is illuminated by the moonlight.

ALAN (*quietly through the music*): Kay.

KAY (*quietly*): Yes, Alan?

ALAN: There will be—something—I can tell you—one day. I'll try—I promise.

The moonlight at the window shows us ALAN looking at her earnestly, and we just catch her answering smile, as the song swells out a little. And then the lights begin to fade, and very soon the three girls are no more than ghosts and all the room is dark, but the moonlight—and the faces of KAY and ALAN—still lingers; until at last there is only the faintest glimmer, and the Conways have gone, the curtain is down, and the play over.

END OF PLAY

I HAVE BEEN HERE BEFORE

A Play in Three Acts

CHARACTERS
in the order of their appearance

SALLY PRATT
SAM SHIPLEY
DR. GÖRTLER
OLIVER FARRANT
JANET ORMUND
WALTER ORMUND

The Scene throughout is the sitting-room of the Black Bull Inn,
Grindle Moor, North Yorkshire, at Whitsuntide.

ACT I
Friday

ACT II
Saturday

ACT III
Sunday

I Have Been Here Before—Copyright, 1937, by J. B. Priestley.

"I Have Been Here Before" was first produced at the Royalty Theatre, London, on Wednesday, 22nd September, 1937, with the following cast:

SALLY PRATT	EILEEN BELDON
SAM SHIPLEY	WILLIAM HEILBRONN
DR. GÖRTLER	LEWIS CASSON
OLIVER FARRANT	WILLIAM FOX
JANET ORMUND	PATRICIA HILLIARD
WALTER ORMUND	WILFRID LAWSON

The play produced by LEWIS CASSON

(For some of Dr. Görtler's theories of Time and Recurrence, I gratefully acknowledge my debt to P. D. Ouspensky's astonishing book, *A New Model of the Universe*. It must be understood, however, that I accept full responsibility for the free use I have made of these borrowed ideas, and that it does not follow because I make use of them that I necessarily accept them.)—J.B.P.

ACT I

Sitting-room of the Black Bull Inn, Grindle Moor, North Yorkshire, a moorland inn of the farmhouse type that serves as the local "pub" and also takes a few guests. The room is simply furnished in the style of a north-country farmhouse sitting-room. On the left, is a long low window, deeply set, with a cushioned seat, and the sunlight is streaming in through this window. At the back, on the left, is a door that serves as an entrance to the Inn to the people staying there, but not to people who merely go for a drink or a meal. On the right at the back is the door that leads to the dining-room, the bar and the rest of the Inn, including two of the guest bedrooms. Through this door a passage can be seen. Downstage right is a slighter door, leading to two bedrooms; it opens directly on to a steep flight of stairs. Through the main door, when open, can be seen a distant glimpse of high-moorland. The fireplace of the room is presumed to be in the fourth wall. On the right is an old-fashioned sofa, and a table towards centre. A couple of shabby but comfortable easy chairs, not too large, at either side of this table, and two or three smaller chairs near walls. Near door to the dining-room is a telephone attached to the wall. It is an evening in June, about eight o'clock. The room is empty at rise of curtain, but immediately afterwards SALLY PRATT enters bringing in some flowers. She is a pleasant-looking country-woman in her middle thirties and is nicely dressed, but wears an apron as if she were still busy with household work. She speaks in a rather loud tone and with a north-country accent, but not too broad. After a moment or two, SAM SHIPLEY enters. He is a stout, humorous, contented Yorkshireman in his sixties. He is in his shirt-sleeves and is smoking a pipe. His accent is broader than his daughter's, but not very broad.

SALLY (*as she finishes her task*): That looks a bit better.

SAM: Ay.

SALLY (*sharply but not unpleasantly*): Father—get your coat on.

SAM: What for?

SALLY: You know what for, I've told you often enough. Landlord o' the Black Bull in his shirt-sleeves like a barman!

SAM: Long as folk pay me what they owe me—they can tak' me for a barman if they like. I'm not a particular chap.

SALLY: Now go on. We'll have somebody here in a minute. I don't

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want Miss Holmes and her friends marching in, catching you in your shirt-sleeves.

SAM: If they never see worse nor that, they'll be lucky. (*Pause.*) When's Mr. Farrant getting back?

SALLY: Any time. He only wanted some cold meat and salad and cheese left for his supper. I wish they were all as easy to please.

He wanders out during this speech, leaving door open behind him. Then he pops his head back.

SAM: Butcher's here.

SALLY: An' he's rare an' late.

As she is going, there is the sound of a car. She hears it and shouts.

Father, I believe there's somebody here.

SAM (*off*): I'm coming.

She hurries out. In the empty room we hear the clock ticking. A moment's pause. Then there is a quiet knocking on the outer door and it opens slowly, and DR. GÖRTLER enters. The clock chimes. He is a man about sixty, in well-worn darkish clothes of a foreign cut. He has a slight foreign accent, and speaks with precision. Although his appearance and manner suggest the quiet detached scholar, he has a good deal of assurance and authority. He looks about him with eager interest and curiosity, and when he has taken the room in, consults a small notebook, as if comparing its appearance with some notes there. Finally, he nods. SAM now returns, wearing his coat. The two men look at one another for a moment.

SAM: Good evn'ing, sir.

DR. GÖRTLER: Good evening. You are the landlord?

SAM: That's right. Sam Shipley.

DR. GÖRTLER: You let rooms to visitors?

SAM: A few.

DR. GÖRTLER: Three or four, perhaps?

SAM (*slightly surprised*): Yes.

SALLY bustles in, then stops short in surprise when she sees DR. GÖRTLER.

SALLY: Oh!—good evening.

DR. GÖRTLER (*smiling*): Good evening.

SALLY: Were you wanting a room?

DR. GÖRTLER (*slowly*): I am not sure.

SALLY (*who does not like this*): Oh!—well it doesn't matter because I'm afraid we can't oblige you.

ACT I I HAVE BEEN HERE BEFORE

DR. GÖRTLER: You have no room?

SALLY: We've only four bedrooms and they're all taken for this Whitsuntide. There's a gentleman in one already, and the other three are coming to-night.

DR. GÖRTLER: So. These three who are coming to-night—you know them?

SALLY (*surprised*): Yes.

DR. GÖRTLER (*gently, tentatively*): Two of them—perhaps—are married people—the man older than his wife—he might be rich—and then—perhaps—a younger man——?

SALLY (*who has listened to this with some surprise*): No. We're expecting three ladies.

DR. GÖRTLER (*rather taken aback*): Three ladies?

SALLY: Teachers from Manchester.

DR. GÖRTLER: Oh! Perhaps there is another inn here, eh?

SAM: Nay, this is t'only one. There's t'Lion at Dale End, but that's eight mile from here.

SALLY: But there's one or two here that lots rooms. You might try Lane Top Farm—Mrs. Fletcher—it's just a bit further on.

SAM: Not five minutes in a car—if you've come in a car.

DR. GÖRTLER (*still showing signs of disappointment*): Yes, I have a little car. I will try this farm but I do not think it will be any use. (*Smiles rather forlornly.*) This must be the wrong year.

SAM: Don't you know what year your friends are coming?

DR. GÖRTLER (*with a slight smile*): They are not my friends. (*He goes to the door.*) How do I find this farm?

SAM (*following him*): When you get out o' t'yard here, turn sharp to your right, and she has a sign up—you can't miss it. (*By the time he has said this, DR. GÖRTLER is outside and SAM is at the door. There is the sound of small car starting up. SAM closes door and comes in.*) There'll be no rain this week-end. We'd have had a smell of it by now.

SALLY: Just fancy! Creeping in like that and asking questions!

SAM: What, yon chap? Well, he's a foreigner o' some sort, you see.

SALLY: What's that got to do with it?

SAM: Well, happen it's foreign style o' doing things. (*Begins to chuckle.*) Nay, what tickled me was him saying he must ha' come at wrong year. Now that's as good as aught I've heard o' some time. If he's going round asking for people—not friends of his, mind you—and he doesn't know where they are nor what year they'll be there—I

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reckon he's got his work cut out. I must tell that to some of 'em in t'bar.

SALLY: You and your bar!

Telephone rings.

SALLY (*at telephone*): Yes, this is the Black Bull. Yes, well I *am* waiting. . . . Oh, Miss Holmes, yes—this is Mrs. Pratt—we were wondering what had become of you. . . . Oh dear dear! . . . Well, I never did! . . . No, if your friend's so poorly I don't suppose you could. . . . No, well it can't be helped. . . . Yes, we're sorry too. . . . Oh, we'll manage to get somebody . . . that's right . . . good-bye. (*Puts down telephone. To SAM.*) Miss Holmes—ringing up from Manchester—to say they can't come.

SAM: Nay!

SALLY: One of the other two's been suddenly taken poorly, and they don't like to leave her.

SAM: Oh!

SALLY (*indignantly*): Yes, I should think it is "oh!" That's all three rooms going begging, at very last minute, an' we could have let 'em four times over. Here we are—Friday night—Whit Saturday tomorrow—an' now only one room taken. We ought to do what everybody else does, an' charge 'em a deposit when they book rooms in advance, and then if they do give backward we're not clean out o' pocket.

SAM: Well, it's happened afore.

SALLY: Does that make it any better?

SAM: Yes, 'cos we know we'll fill 'em up easy. Black Bull's nivver had rooms empty o' Whitsuntide. There'll be some motorists coming. Ay, and happen some business chaps who'll spend more nor them three women teachers. All they want is cups o' tea, an' they'd nivver put their noses into t'bar.

OLIVER FARRANT *enters. He has been walking and wears a tweed jacket and flannel trousers, and is rather dusty. He is about 28-30, good-looking, with something of the boy left in him and something of the intellectual man. He has a decisive, slightly donnish manner, which shows itself least with these two, with whom he is on pleasant easy terms. He has more personal charm than would appear from his actual words, and though he suffers from the rather priggish conceit of the successful intellectual, there is more of this in the matter than in the manner of his talk.*

FARRANT: Any sherry left, Sam?

SAM: Yes, Mr. Farrant. (*Goes to get it.*)

ACT I I HAVE BEEN HERE BEFORE

SALLY (*who obviously likes him*): Your supper'll be ready when you are.

FARRANT: Good! (*Sitting down and relaxing.*) The last few miles were becoming a bit grim. (*Remembering, with whisper and slightly droll manner.*) Oh!—have the three females from Manchester arrived yet?

SALLY: No, they're not coming. One of 'em's poorly.

FARRANT: Well, I can't say I was looking forward to them—but I'm sorry. It's bad news for you, isn't it?

SALLY: It's a nuisance, but we'll fill up to-morrow all right. I only hope, whoever we do have, you can get on with 'em, Mr. Farrant.

FARRANT: Now you're not going to suggest I'm hard to get on with.

SALLY (*earnestly*): No, I don't mean that, Mr. Farrant, but you know what it is. If we take people at last minute, we can't be too particular, and when you've all got to sit in here together, it might be a bit awkward.

FARRANT: Oh, don't worry about me. I don't suppose I shall be in much this week-end, anyhow, and if the worst comes to the worst I can always go up to my room and read.

SAM enters with a glass of sherry.

SALLY: I'll see if you've everything you want in there. Do you like Wensleydale cheese, Mr. Farrant, 'cos I've got some?

FARRANT: I don't know. I'd like to try it.

SALLY goes out.

SAM: Bit o' nice Wensleydale tak's some beating. Have a good walk, Mr. Farrant?

FARRANT: Yes, thanks, Sam. I must have done about sixteen miles. Down the dale, then across by the church, up the moor and back over Grindle Top.

SAM: Ay, that'll be all o' sixteen mile. Did you find a bit o' bog again at the Top?

FARRANT: No, I'm getting artful, Sam. I dodged it this time—worked well over to the right. The ordnance map's all wrong about Grindle Top. (*Sips sherry, and talks easily.*) You know, Sam, there must have been three or four times as many people living in this dale two or three hundred years ago.

SAM: I've heard 'em say that.

FARRANT: Look at all those old ruins of byres and barns and sheep pounds—and the miles of old walls on the moor.

SAM: Ay, they built them afore folk went into the towns. I remember me grandfather talking about that when I wor a little lad.

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FARRANT: Somebody ought to try and find the old records of these dales. Why, in the Middle Ages, what with all that old moorland farming life, and the abbeys and a castle or two, the whole place must have been humming with people.

SAM: I'll bet it worn't humming wi' folk to-day.

FARRANT: Didn't see a soul this afternoon over the Top except a couple of shepherds.

He finishes his sherry, and begins moving towards his bedroom. SAM takes glass, and then telephone rings. As SAM rather dubiously prepares to answer it, SALLY hurries in.

SAM: Yes, this is Black Bull. That's right. . . .

SALLY (*impatiently*): Here, I'll answer it, Father.

SAM: Hold on a minute.

She takes it from him.

SALLY: Yes, who is it? . . . Yes, Mr. Ormund. . . . Well, it just happens we have two rooms because somebody's just given us backword. . . . Yes, they're both ready, you can come up as soon as you like. Straight away? . . . Will you be wanting supper to-night? Oh, I see. . . . Well then, you turn to your left just outside Marlingset, and then straight up and you can't miss it. . . . That's right. (*Puts down telephone and is rather excited.*) Now would you believe it?

SAM (*humorously*): I don't know till you tell me.

SALLY (*excitedly*): That's a Mr. and Mrs. Ormund. They rang up from Marlingset to see if they could stay over the week-end—they want a bedroom each—and they're coming straight away—they've just had their dinner at the White Hart—and d'you know what I think?

SAM: No, I don't.

SALLY: I believe this Mr. Ormund is one o' them big Ormunds—y'know—Ormunds Limited.

SAM: Nay, he wouldn't come here if he wor.

SALLY: How do you know? And he sounded as if he'd plenty o' money. Wanted two rooms and didn't ask price or anything. I'll bet you he's one of Ormunds Limited. Him and his wife—they'll be company for Mr. Farrant.

SAM: I told you we'd have them rooms let i' no time. (*Pauses.*) I wonder if that foreign chap's fixed up at Lane End?

SALLY: He didn't even know whether he wanted to stay or not.

SAM: No, but happen it'd suit him here now. We have a married couple for him, if that's what he wants. (*FARRANT returns, having*

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changed his shoes and tidied himself.) You're having company to-night, Mr. Farrant. *(Grins and goes out.)*

SALLY: There's a Mr. and Mrs. Ormund coming to-night, to stay the week-end.

FARRANT *(interested)*: Ormund?

SALLY: Yes, an' I fancy it's one o' them big Ormunds—Ormunds Limited—manufacturers—I expect you've heard o' them?

FARRANT: I ought to. They put up most of the money for my school.

SALLY: Well, I'm sure this is one o' 'em.

The noise of small car is heard outside.

FARRANT: Here already?

SALLY: No, they couldn't have come from Marlingset so soon.

She moves towards door, OLIVER watching idly. Before she can open it, DR. GÖRTLER enters slowly, carrying an old-fashioned bag. He looks at SALLY, then sees OLIVER and appears to recognise him. SALLY looks at him, then at OLIVER, rather bewildered.

DR. GÖRTLER *(to FARRANT, with some eagerness)*: You are staying here?

FARRANT: Yes. *(Pauses.)*

DR. GÖRTLER *carefully puts down his bag. There is something decisive in his manner.*

DR. GÖRTLER: I am Doctor Görtler.

FARRANT *(rather puzzled)*: My name's Farrant, Oliver Farrant.

DR. GÖRTLER: A schoolmaster, I think?

FARRANT: Yes, I'm head of Lamberton.

DR. GÖRTLER: I am now an exile from my own university—and my country, Germany—and I have been doing some little work for the University of London. *(Turns to SALLY.)* And still you have no room for me?

SALLY *gives OLIVER a quick questioning look. He nods reassuringly.*

SALLY: Well, as a matter of fact we have now, because those three ladies aren't coming and we've a room to spare——

DR. GÖRTLER: I should very much like to stay here.

SALLY *(businesslike)*: We charge twelve-and-six a day—all in. That's for this holiday time and really we ought to charge more because we could easily get it—but——

DR. GÖRTLER *(simply)*: But you do not like to be greedy, eh?

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SALLY (*rather taken aback*): No.

DR. GÖRTLER: I will stay. The car will be all right there for a time, eh?

SALLY: Yes. My father can put it away.

DR. GÖRTLER: And my room?

SALLY: It's up there.

FARRANT: Next door to me. I'm just going to have some supper, Dr. Görtler. You'd better join me.

DR. GÖRTLER (*taking SALLY in too*): Thank you, yes. I should like something to eat. Anything.

SALLY: I'll see to it. My father can show you your room. (*Hurries out.*)

FARRANT: It's a simple unpretentious little place—but they're nice people—and I think you'll be comfortable.

DR. GÖRTLER: Thank you.

FARRANT: What's your subject? Science?

DR. GÖRTLER: It *was* physics and mathematics.

FARRANT: Not now?

DR. GÖRTLER (*with a slight shrug*): I still teach these subjects. But for myself—I go further——

FARRANT: Research, eh?

DR. GÖRTLER: You might say—exploring.

FARRANT (*with a smile*): I know. Spherical geometry. Two parallel lines meeting. Two angles of a triangle no longer greater than the third angle. Poor old Euclid turned upside down and inside out. I have a maths. master who talks like that—for his own amusement—not ours—— (*Pauses, then looks hard at DR. GÖRTLER.*) You know, I must have seen your photograph somewhere.

DR. GÖRTLER: No, I do not think so. I am not an Einstein.

FARRANT (*hesitantly*): I thought I—seemed—to recognise you.

DR. GÖRTLER: We often seem to recognise people—and places.

FARRANT: I don't.

DR. GÖRTLER: You have been ill?

FARRANT: I was ordered a short rest. (*Pauses, then resumes, rather hastily.*) They say that it's when you're nervously exhausted that the two halves of your brain don't synchronise. Then they play that recognition trick on you. Isn't that the explanation?

DR. GÖRTLER: Yes. But do not believe it. We are not as simple as bicycles.

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SAM *enters*.

SAM: Supper's ready, Mr. Farrant.

FARRANT *moves and SAM holds door open for him*.

FARRANT (*to DR. GÖRTLER as he goes*): You'll join me in the dining-room, eh? (*He goes.*)

SAM (*heartily*): Now then, sir, you're here, after all. And you'd like to see your room.

DR. GÖRTLER: Please.

SAM *goes across for DR. GÖRTLER's bag, talking as he moves, takes bag and returns, moving towards door to bedrooms*.

SAM: Ay, not five minutes after you'd gone, them three ladies rang up to say they couldn't come, so we'd room after all for you. Just the one left.

DR. GÖRTLER: But the other two rooms?

SAM: Oh—we got rid o' them all right. There's a Mr. and Mrs. Ormund coming to-night into them.

DR. GÖRTLER (*triumphantly, with a touch of wonder, really to himself*): *So! So! Ich bin glücklich.*

SAM (*almost through door now, and climbing stairs*): What language is that, sir? German?

DR. GÖRTLER: Yes. It means "I am fortunate".

They go out and their voices die away. The stage is empty. The light begins to fade slowly, but there is a last glow in it. There is a pause of a moment or two, then DR. GÖRTLER and SAM return.

DR. GÖRTLER: You say that because you have been happy here?

SAM: Yes, I can't grumble at all. I've never made much out o' this place, but I've had all I want. I'd ask for naught better—if I had my time over again.

DR. GÖRTLER (*interested*): Do you often say that?

SAM: Say what?

DR. GÖRTLER (*slowly*): If you had your time over again.

SAM (*surprised*): Well—no—not specially. I mean to say—it's just a way—like—o' putting it. Everybody says it.

SALLY *enters holding door from bar open behind her*.

SALLY (*not very cordially*): Your supper's ready, Dr.—er—

DR. GÖRTLER: Thank you. (*Turning, rather mischievously, to SAM.*) My friend—perhaps you *will* have your time over again.

SALLY (*from passage outside*): In here, that's right. And if you don't find everything you want, just ring the bell. (*She watches him go, then*

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comes in, closing the door behind her.) If four of 'em's going to sit in here, it wants changing round a bit.

SALLY is now busy, with some small assistance from SAM, slightly re-arranging the furniture of the room, changing the tablecloth on the centre table, and finally switching on the lights and drawing the curtains.

What was that Dr. Görtler talking about?

SAM: Nay, I just happened to say "If I'd my time over again"—you know how you do?—and he seemed right taken up with it. (*Repeating it speculatively.*) "If I'd my time over again." Nay it's a common enough saying.

SALLY (*in a slow, grumbling tone, as she moves about*): Yes, it's common enough. An' it's silly enough an' all. A lot of use it is you or anybody else saying what they'd do if they had their time over again. A fat chance they have, haven't they? Time moves on and it takes you with it, whatever you say—as I know only too well.

SAM: Ay. Though it's only same for you as for onnybody else, lass.

SALLY: Well, I'm not so sure about that.

SAM: We all go on getting older, Sally.

SALLY: I didn't mean just that. Y'know, father, it's only four years since Bob and I were staying here with you over Whitsun. And Charlie was still a little lad. The three of us here . . . laughing and talking and going on day long . . . and nothing to tell us it was nearly all over. . . .

SAM (*disturbed and affectionate*): Ay—I know—lass—but don't think about it.

SALLY: It's not so long since, but time's run on. . . . It's taken Bob from me . . . even Charlie's growing up and doesn't need me like he used to. . . . I almost might be an old woman wondering where they're going to bury me. . . .

SAM: Now then, Sally lass, it's not so bad as it might be.

SALLY: I might have thirty years to live yet—and I'd swop the lot for just that week we had here, four years ago. . . . But what's the use?

SAM: Ay—but give it a chance. You'll forget.

SALLY: I know I'll forget. I'm forgetting now. I can't hear Bob's voice as plain as I could a year or two since. It's taking even that from me now. . . . That's what time does to you . . . and if it's God's idea, He'll get no thanks from me. . . . (*The curtains are drawn, and the lights are on now. She looks critically at the room.*) Well, I don't think I can do any better with it as it is. I've sometimes had an idea

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we might do better to bring the big table in and make this the dining-room—I mean, just for people who's staying here. But it's too far from the kitchen. (*She is silent a moment, and then is heard the siren of a very large car.*) It'll be Mr. and Mrs. Ormund. Here, I must nip upstairs and see if their rooms look all right. Go and see to their luggage.

She hurries out. SAM goes to the outer door, leaving it open as he goes through. Voices are heard outside. A pause. Then JANET ORMUND enters slowly. She is an attractive sensitive woman about twenty-eight, and is dressed for the country in a simple but expensive style. She enters the room with a slow indifference, then suddenly stiffens, frowns, looks incredulous, then examines it eagerly, without much movement. It is clear that there is some recognition, mixed with incredulity. The clock chimes at her. A sudden uprush of emotion makes her feel almost faint, and she sinks into a chair, exhausted, breathing heavily.

Now her husband, WALTER ORMUND, enters. He is a biggish man in his early forties, whose manner alternates between alert, sharp command, on the one hand, and a gloomy brooding, on the other. He is dressed in quiet tweeds, the kind a man might wear at an office before leaving for the country. He carries a much-used dispatch-case. He has no eyes for the room, only for his wife.

ORMUND: What's the matter, Janet?

JANET: I felt rather faint.

She takes charge of herself. He would like to help but doesn't know how to, so remains large and helpless. She looks about her, then at him.

ORMUND: Probably tired.

JANET: No. . . . I'm not . . . really. (*Looks about her again, then at him.*) I had—a sort of feeling—this room—— (*Gives it up.*)

ORMUND: We needn't stay here, y'know.

JANET: No.

ORMUND: We can push on. There's plenty of time.

JANET: Yes, of course we can.

ORMUND: I can simply say "Sorry, not our kind of place," give them something for their trouble, and off we go.

JANET: Quite simple. And—I think—rather comforting.

ORMUND (*with touch of burlesque*): You mean—one of us hasn't been taken ill—the car hasn't suddenly and mysteriously broken down—there isn't a fog or a flood or a landslide—none of those sinister compulsory things—?

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JANET (*with a smile*): No, not one. (*Then with sudden seriousness*.) We're quite free. We can choose. We're not being compelled.

ORMUND: Not in the least. We can go now. Just say the word.

JANET: Why don't you say it?

ORMUND (*marching to the door*): All right. I'll say it. Let's go.

JANET (*hesitates, then with a slight laugh*): No. We'll stay.

ORMUND (*with a touch of bitterness*): Anything for a change, eh?

JANET: Walter—is that one of the remarks you promised not to make?

ORMUND (*rueful*): Oh—I hope not.

JANET: It sounded like the beginning of one. Remember—you promised. Play fair.

ORMUND (*who would like to play fair*): I'm trying, Janet. I'm trying hard. Only—I do seem to be in the one situation in the world where it's impossible for a man to be fair. You've no idea what a devil of a job it is.

JANET: I know, Walter.

ORMUND (*not sharply*): You don't.

JANET: No—that's the trouble, I suppose—I don't. (*Looking at him with a touch of wistfulness and pity*.) But—just to be easy and friendly—for once, no arguments, no reproaches—that'll be something, won't it?

ORMUND: Yes, it'll be—something.

JANET (*half-laughing, half-vexed*): Oh—Walter! The very way you said that——!

ORMUND: No, no, I didn't mean it that way. I'm really doing my best. You're right. God knows you're right. It'll be something.

JANET: I'll do my very best.

ORMUND: And I'll do better still. You'll see. Nice. Easy. Friendly. All according to plan.

He looks about him, whistling softly. She looks at him, and he breaks off and gives her a careful reassuring smile. She returns it, but nevertheless looks troubled. SALLY enters, with an obvious sense of the importance of the occasion.

SALLY (*rather breathless*): Good evening, Mr. and Mrs. Ormud, isn't it?

JANET: Yes.

SALLY: You did say you wanted both rooms, didn't you?

ORMUND (*humorously*): Yes. I have to have a room to myself

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because sometimes I waken up in the middle of the night and begin scribbling figures on bits of paper—and then—I have to smoke. Yes, smoke. Are you insured against fire?

SALLY: Yes, we are that.

ORMUND: It's all right then. I shall smoke a lot—and burn holes in your best sheets.

SALLY (*entering into this*): I'll make you pay for 'em if you do, Mr. Ormund. (*To both of them.*) I expect you'd like to see your rooms, wouldn't you?

ORMUND: You have a look at 'em, Janet. I must telephone to Sykes. (*JANET and SALLY go out. ORMUND telephones.*) Trunks. . . . Is that Trunks? . . . This is— Grindle Five. I want Brensham 67. . . . Yes, Brensham 67. . . . All right. . . .

Waits, telephone to ear. SAM enters.

SAM: Your bags are upstairs, sir, and the car's in the garage.

ORMUND: Thanks. Bring me a large whisky-and-soda, will you. MacFarlane's Old Liqueur, if you've got it. (*Telephoning, as SAM goes out.*) Hello, Brensham? Oh—that you, Sykes? Walter Ormund here. We're fixed up in a little pub on the moors—the Black Bull, Grindle Moor. Phone number's Grindle Five. . . . Yes, get me here any time—shan't be going far. . . . Yes, will you work out the marketing costs, and I'll do the rest. . . . I've got all the information here, including Orgenbaum's report. . . . Who? Pensfield? . . . No, he won't make any trouble. I'll offer him a seat on the board. That'll keep him quiet. . . . Not he! I know too much about him. . . .

SAM comes in with large whisky and soda, and as he is passing, ORMUND reaches out and takes it, to SAM'S surprise, and has a long drink while still listening. SAM gives him a droll look and goes out.
Yes . . . nothing in that, Sykes. . . . Add two and half per cent to the overhead then. . . . I'll ring you up before Monday morning. . . . Well, work all night then—put a wet towel round your head and a bottle of whisky on your desk. . . . Nonsense! Holidays are for boys and girls, not men. . . . I know all about your children, but they can get on without you. . . . All right. I'm depending on you. 'Bye.

He puts down the telephone, takes his drink to the table, and pulling an old envelope out of his pocket, makes a few quick notes on it. Then he looks at what he has written, so absorbed that he does not notice the entrance of JANET, who comes in quietly. She watches him take an absent-minded pull at his drink.

JANET: You know, Walter, you'd several whiskies at that place where we had dinner.

ORMUND: I know. And I'd several before that. And now I'm having

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another. And what I say is this. If the only way I can find dividends for several hundred shareholders and wages for several thousands of employees is by drinking several whiskies, then I must drink several whiskies.

JANET: But you're not going to do any work this week-end?

ORMUND (*now sitting with his notes*): I must. I've just been telephoning Sykes. We've a whole big scheme to work out before Wednesday.

JANET: This isn't going to be much of a change for you, is it? More work—more whisky.

ORMUND: A change is too much to hope for. Let me just keep ticking over—just ticking over—that'll do.

JANET (*at once sorry and protesting*): I can't blame you for being bitter, Walter, but it isn't going to help us.

ORMUND (*sincerely*): Bitter! I'm not being bitter, my dear. Not in the least.

Takes a good drink.

JANET (*getting a whiff perhaps as she passes behind him*): Loathsome stuff! I can't think how you go on and on drinking it.

ORMUND: There's a good reason why the distilleries are working at full blast. They're busy giving us Old Highland Blended Courage by the case. Faith and Hope at twelve-and-six a bottle. Love seven years in bond.

JANET: And in another minute, Walter, you'll be attacking me again.

ORMUND: No, no, I'm not attacking you, I'm defending whisky. It's dependable. It doesn't change its mind, think it's in love with you and then know better. It may have a little more fusel oil in it this year than last, but that's all the difference. That's why people all over the world now are steadily pickling themselves in it.

JANET: If it made you silly-drunk, I don't think I'd object.

ORMUND: My dear Janet, you'd walk straight out on me.

JANET: No. The trouble is, it only makes you gloomy.

ORMUND: No, if I pour enough down into the darkness inside, they begin to floodlight things down there. Beautiful images begin to shine. Venuses rise from the sea of Scotch and soda, glorious smiling kind wenches, all looking rather alike— (*Breaks off suddenly.*) Rooms all right?

JANET (*grateful for this*): Yes. Queer little windows and a heavenly country smell.

ORMUND: Any spotted china beasts?

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JANET: Yes. Dogs with long necks. They've blue spots in my room, red spots in yours.

ORMUND: Good! I haven't seen any of those beasts for years and I'm fond of 'em.

JANET (*hopefully*): I believe you're going to like it here.

ORMUND (*with sudden change of mood*): No. (*He finishes his drink.*) I can't help feeling it was a mistake coming here.

JANET (*mildly*): It was your idea.

ORMUND: A lot of my ideas are bad. This is too small, too quiet. It throws us straight back on to ourselves——

JANET: That's a good thing.

ORMUND: It's a good thing when people are all right with one another. But when they're trying to be easy and friendly and one of 'em has died on the other, as if he were last year's worst hat, then if they've any sense they want to go and stay at some large damn silly place screaming with jazz bands where you can't possibly think. Here you can't help thinking. I've started already. . . .

FARRANT *enters, and stops short, and he and JANET look at one another. Then ORMUND looks too, and the clock joins in with its tick and chime, as if it had been expecting this. An odd tenseness for a moment.*

FARRANT (*with a certain effort*): We'd better introduce ourselves. My name's Farrant.

ORMUND (*his bewilderment over*): That's it, of course. You're Oliver Farrant, Head of Lamberton. I'm Walter Ormund. My wife.

FARRANT: I didn't expect to meet one of the school governors here.

ORMUND (*not importantly*): I've been too busy to go and see the school yet, but I was one of the governors who put you in there. Thought we ought to have a young man.

FARRANT (*smiling*): You were quite right.

ORMUND: But what are you doing here. Term time, isn't it?

FARRANT: I was told to knock off and have a rest.

ORMUND: Overworking?

FARRANT: That's what they said. I feel rather a fraud—I'm walking miles and miles every day, and eating like a horse——

ORMUND (*looking hard at him*): Look a bit nervous, though.

JANET: How did you find your way up here?

FARRANT: Mrs. Pratt—that's the landlord's daughter—a widow—has a boy, Charlie, who's at Lamberton. He told me about it.

JANET: Mrs. Pratt was telling me all about her boy. Is he clever?

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FARRANT (*not at his best*): Yes, he's got brains. He's the kind of boy who makes me feel glad I'm a schoolmaster. Ought to be fairly certain of an Oxford scholarship later on. We've a good many boys of his kind.

JANET: Do you mean—clever ones or from this sort of home?

FARRANT (*rather deliberately*): I mean—boys with brains from this class. A lot of them have brains, y'know.

JANET (*who does not like his manner*): Yes, it never occurred to me that they wouldn't have.

FARRANT: And it's part of our policy at Lamberton to encourage them.

ORMUND (*dryly*): Yes, it was part of *our* policy when we built the school.

FARRANT: Sorry, I was forgetting.

ORMUND: That's all right. Have a drink?

FARRANT: No, thanks. Too soon after supper.

ORMUND: There's a bar in there, isn't there?

FARRANT: Yes. But the talk's not very amusing.

ORMUND (*almost giving him up as a bad job*): Anybody else staying here?

FARRANT: Yes, a Doctor Görtler.

ORMUND: German?

FARRANT: Yes, professor of mathematics taking refuge over here. Judging by his talk at supper, he seems to have wandered a long way from mathematics now. I don't quite make him out.

JANET: Why?

FARRANT: Oh—he seems to be turning mystical. Probably seen too much trouble. The German intellect doesn't always stand the strain. I'll be down later, if you want to talk about the school.

Nods and goes up to his room, closing door behind him. ORMUND and JANET look at one another.

ORMUND (*quietly*): Without having seen him, purely on his record—and against considerable opposition, I had that young man appointed Head of Lamberton.

JANET (*rather grimly*): My dear, I know you did.

ORMUND: Well?

JANET (*with irony*): Oh—very nice, friendly, modest sort of young man—not the least little bit conceited and dogmatic—very charming—humph!

She laughs.

ORMUND: Yes, most extraordinary thing. Thought I'd take to him. Took to him at once on paper. And he *looks* all right. Ought in fact to be a very attractive fellow. But—well—there you are——

He has risen now and turns to the door leading to the dining-room and bar. This brings him face to face with DR. GÖRTLER, who has just entered. DR. GÖRTLER looks curiously at the ORMUNDS, especially at JANET, and is then ceremonious.

DR. GÖRTLER (*with a little bow*): Doctor Görtler. Mr. and Mrs. Ormund?

ORMUND: Yes, good evening.

JANET: Good evening.

DR. GÖRTLER: And a very beautiful evening.

JANET: Yes, hasn't it been?

ORMUND: Would you like to join me in a drink?

DR. GÖRTLER: No, thank you.

ORMUND: Janet?

JANET: No, thank you, Walter.

ORMUND (*gravely*): Then—I think—I shall try the bar. (*As JANET makes a murmur of protest.*) No, no. Shan't be long.

He goes out. DR. GÖRTLER settles down and looks in a friendly but very deliberate fashion at JANET, who smiles in return.

JANET: Have you been up here before, Dr. Görtler?

DR. GÖRTLER (*watching her*): No. Have you?

JANET (*frowning a little*): No—I haven't—really.

DR. GÖRTLER: You do not seem very certain.

JANET (*slowly*): I've been wondering——

DR. GÖRTLER (*as she hesitates*): Yes?

JANET: I was only wondering if I could have been here when I was a very small child.

She breaks off, and looks at him, and then away from him. Pause.

DR. GÖRTLER: Mrs. Ormund, I am a student—a very old one now. Sometimes we students do not seem to have very good manners. I do not wish you to think I am—inquisitive, impertinent.

JANET (*with slight smile*): It didn't occur to me that you were—or might be.

DR. GÖRTLER: Lately I have been enlarging my studies—to include the human mind. So I go about asking questions.

JANET: If this means you want to ask me some questions, you can. But I don't think you'd find me much use. I've always thought the

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psycho-analysts monstrously exaggerated everything. I can't believe that all the little fears and fancies one has are of any real interest or value.

DR. GÖRTLER: Even a few years ago, I would have agreed with you. But now I see that we do not understand ourselves, the nature of our lives. What seems to happen continually just outside the edge of our attention—the little fears and fancies, as you call them—may be all-important because they belong to a profounder reality, like the vague sounds of the city outside that we hear sometimes inside a theatre.

JANET: Oh!

She stares at him, almost terrified.

DR. GÖRTLER: What is it?

JANET (*hesitantly and with wonder*): You see . . . suddenly I felt . . . I could have sworn . . . you'd said all that to me before. . . . You and I—sitting, talking, like this . . . and then you said "because they belong . . . to a profounder reality . . . like the sounds of the city . . . we hear sometimes inside a theatre. . . ." (*Dismisses the mood, then hastily.*) I'm so sorry. I must be tired.

A pause.

DR. GÖRTLER: Mrs. Ormund, what made you come here?

JANET: Oh—pure chance. We wanted to spend this week-end somewhere in the country. A man at the hotel we dined at—to-night—not an hour ago—suggested this place. I'd never heard of it before.

DR. GÖRTLER: It was all quite dull, ordinary?

JANET: Yes . . . until we were driving from Marlingset up here. . . .

DR. GÖRTLER: Yes?

JANET: I find this—rather difficult— (*She breaks off, and then, with urgency.*) Quite suddenly, I began to feel excited. . . . About nothing, it seemed. . . . My heart was beating terribly. . . . We stopped once . . . only a moment, to make sure about the way. . . . At the roadside there were some white harebells . . . just some white harebells. . . . Of course they looked lovely there . . . white and fragile and perfect, at the edge of the great dark moor. . . . It must have been—just that . . . anything else—is silly.

DR. GÖRTLER (*slowly*): There has not been in your life so far a moment of crisis that you associate with these flowers?

JANET (*slowly, and staring at him*): No. But that's exactly the feeling I had about them.

DR. GÖRTLER (*prompting her*): And then—you arrived here?

JANET (*rather slowly*): Yes.

ACT I I HAVE BEEN HERE BEFORE

A distinct pause, during which DR. GÖRTLER rises and goes nearer to her.

DR. GÖRTLER: You have met Mr. Farrant?

JANET: Yes. But only for a few minutes.

DR. GÖRTLER: He is very young for such a responsible post.

JANET: Yes.

DR. GÖRTLER: But that does not matter, of course. He is fortunate, but he deserves to be. Very clever—and very charming, very good-hearted too, I think——

Looks at her questioningly.

JANET (*rather stiffly*): I'm sure he must be, Dr. Görtler. (*As he stares at her speculatively.*) Why do you stare at me like that?

DR. GÖRTLER: I beg your pardon. I was thinking. (*Pause.*) Mr. Ormund—does he feel any of these things to-night?

JANET (*with a slight smile*): I think you'd better ask him that yourself.

DR. GÖRTLER: Yes, I will.

JANET (*rather hastily, with a resumption of more social manner*): You may find him—a little difficult. I mean—you mustn't mind if he seems rather brusque—odd.

DR. GÖRTLER: Why should I? I am—brusque and odd—myself.

JANET (*hastily*): He's really very kind and considerate, when you know him, but he's got the most tremendous responsibilities. I thought he was going to have a rest this week-end but he's brought a lot of work with him. He works far too hard.

DR. GÖRTLER (*calmly*): Yes, I think he is an unhappy man.

JANET (*shocked, reproachful*): Dr. Görtler——! (*Then dropping social manner.*) Why do you say that?

DR. GÖRTLER: I have seen enough unhappiness now to recognise it.

FARRANT enters from his room, with a rather large book under his arm. He and JANET take a quick look at one another. DR. GÖRTLER watches them both. Then FARRANT crosses to the bureau to sit down with his book. You feel the silence. JANET obviously does not like it. DR. GÖRTLER is interested, watchful.

JANET (*who must break this horrible silence*): What are your special subjects, Mr. Farrant?

FARRANT (*rather too carefully keeping his place open in book*): History and economics.

JANET (*doing her best*): I don't care about economics. It never seems to me to be true. But I wish I knew more history—real history,

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not the dreary stuff they still taught us when I was at school. I'm always meaning to learn more about it.

FARRANT (*with a suggestion of the schoolmaster*): Well, it's going on all round you, y'know. It's not something that's dead and done with. We're making it all the time.

JANET: I don't feel I'm making very much.

FARRANT: No, but once you realise you're *in* history, helping to make it, you see the whole thing differently. That's how we try to teach it now. I show them how completely interdependent we are.

DR. GÖRTLER (*who has been missing nothing*): Yes, we are like threads in a pattern.

FARRANT: There's a pretty example of mutual dependence—quite a nice little pattern—here in this pub. Sam and Mrs. Pratt are devoted to this boy of hers, Charlie—

DR. GÖRTLER: He is at your school. So they depend upon you.

FARRANT: Yes. But the school partly depends on the Ormunds, and especially on your husband, Mrs. Ormund—

He is interrupted by the entrance of SALLY, who is followed after a moment by ORMUND.

SALLY: Excuse me, Mrs. Ormund. But I just wanted to tell you that we have breakfast at half-past eight, if that's not too early.

JANET: No, I'd like it then, Mrs. Pratt.

SALLY: And is that all right for you, Dr. Görtler?

DR. GÖRTLER: Yes, thank you.

SALLY: And would you like a cup of tea earlier on, Mrs. Ormund?

JANET: Not to-morrow morning, thank you. What about you, Walter?

SALLY: Oh—I'm sorry.

ORMUND (*coming forward*): That's all right. And no tea. And no breakfast either. Just a pot of strong coffee for me—about half-past nine.

SALLY: All right, Mr. Ormund.

FARRANT (*rather peremptorily*): I'll be out all day again to-morrow, so can I have some sandwiches in the morning, please?

SALLY: Yes, Mr. Farrant.

ORMUND (*to FARRANT*): Going striding over the moors all day?

FARRANT: I'll be out all day, I don't know about striding.

ORMUND (*to JANET*): That's what you want, isn't it? Better go along with him.

JANET (*dismayed*): But what are you going to do?

ACT I I HAVE BEEN HERE BEFORE

ORMUND: Oh—I'll do a bit of work—and then slack round. You'd better join up with Farrant here. (*To FARRANT.*) She can walk, you know.

FARRANT (*plainly without enthusiasm*): Well—it might be rather rough going—but of course—if you'd like to come along—

JANET (*furious with both men, shortly*): No, thank you. I may want some sandwiches, Mrs. Pratt. I'll let you know in the morning.

ORMUND *crosses to outside door and stands looking out.*

SALLY: Yes, Mrs. Ormund. I've a long day to-morrow—Whit Saturday—an' folks wanting lunches and teas—so I thought I'd get to bed in good time to-night.

JANET: Yes, of course.

SALLY (*somewhat embarrassed*): We're very proud to have you and Mr. Ormund here. Nearly all the money father and I have between us—that we saved to help our Charlie later on—is in Ormunds Limited.

JANET: Do you hear that, Walter? You're among shareholders, so be careful.

ORMUND (*half-turning, with mock groan*): I know, I know.

DR. GÖRTLER: There, you see, is more dependence.

SALLY (*distrusting this*): What's that?

JANET: It sounds like an insult, but it isn't. We've been discovering how much we depend on one another. You're in it because your boy's at Mr. Farrant's school.

SALLY: And very lucky he is to be there too—with Mr. Farrant looking after him.

JANET: And now you say you've money in Ormunds Limited.

FARRANT: And the school partly depends on Ormunds too. Which brings me in.

JANET: And I'm certainly one of the dependents. Walter, you're the only really great one, the giant Atlas himself. We all depend upon you, but you don't depend upon anybody.

DR. GÖRTLER (*quietly, but with startling effect*): Nein! (*They all stare at him.*) Mr. Ormund depends very much upon somebody. (*To JANET.*) He depends upon you—his wife.

ORMUND (*quietly, with cold anger*): That's not the kind of remark we appreciate from a stranger in this country, my dear sir.

JANET: Walter!

DR. GÖRTLER (*rising*): I am sorry. I am—as you say—a stranger—in a foreign country.

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JANET: It's all right, Dr. Görtler.

DR. GÖRTLER (*as he moves towards door, to his room*): Good night.

ORMUND (*crossing to him*): No, doctor. I shouldn't have spoken like that. Now don't be offended.

DR. GÖRTLER: I am not offended. Only tired. So please—no apologies. Good night.

The others say good night and watch him go out, closing the door behind him.

SALLY (*dropping voice, dubiously*): I hope it's going to be all right.

JANET: Why, Mrs. Pratt, what's wrong?

SALLY: I mean—him being here.

ORMUND: Yes, of course. Why not?

SALLY: Well, Mr. Ormund—only that he seems to be upsetting you.

FARRANT (*sharply*): Now, Mrs. Pratt! Just because he's a foreigner.

SALLY: No, it isn't that, Mr. Farrant. Though I'll admit I'm not used to foreigners. But what's he doing here?

ORMUND: Well, what are we all doing here?

SALLY: No, that's different, Mr. Ormund. Why should he come here looking for you?

ORMUND (*puzzled*): For me?

SALLY: No, for you three.

This linking of the three of them together—for the first time—has its immediate effect, as if it chimed with some deep obscure feeling each of them knew. There is a pause, before SALLY resumes.

He comes here—looking about him—and when I tell him we've no room to spare because I'm expecting three visitors—he looks at me and asks if two of 'em are a married couple with the man older than his wife, and the other a younger man. And when I say No, we're expecting three ladies from Manchester, he seems disappointed and says something about it being the wrong year. So off he goes, and then the three ladies say they can't come, and you ring up for rooms, and when he comes back, there's a room for him too, and you're all here, and it's just what he expected.

ORMUND: Oh—he was looking for somebody, and then gave it up.

SALLY: And then upsetting you like that! He makes me feel right uneasy. (*Short pause.*) Nothing more you'll be wanting, Mrs. Ormund?

JANET: No, thank you, Mrs. Pratt. Good night.

SALLY: Good night.

ACT I I HAVE BEEN HERE BEFORE

The two men say good night as she goes. ORMUND takes some papers from his dispatch-case, preparing to work. FARRANT is going back to his book.

JANET (*who has obviously been thinking about it all*): How could he have been looking for us?

ORMUND (*busy with his papers*): He couldn't.

FARRANT (*looking up, in light easy tone*): The arrival of a mysterious foreigner, plus a coincidence, has obviously been too much to-night for poor Mrs. Pratt. And Görtler's prophetic manner has only made it worse.

ORMUND: Yes, he rather asks for it.

JANET (*after thinking for a few moments*): Well, I'm tired, Walter. (*Moving towards door.*) Your room's the far one.

FARRANT (*casually*): I thought I'd met him before somewhere.

The clock chimes.

JANET (*turning, sharply at door*): You did! Where?

FARRANT: That's the trouble. Can't remember.

JANET (*tentatively*): Has it . . . worried you?

FARRANT (*slightly surprised*): Yes . . . a little. Why?

JANET: I . . . wondered. (*pause, then coming forward.*) Walter, will you stop working just one minute——?

ORMUND (*looking up from his work, first at JANET, then at FARRANT, then back to JANET, coolly and humorously*): You want me to tell you all about it? Quite simple. We're all three a bit off our heads. Farrant says he's been overworking and the doctor sent him away. I've been half-dotty for years. And as for you, Janet, you're just a young woman, always ready to have your fortune told and your horoscope read, always longing for marvels and miracles, not even wanting to be sane.

JANET (*with a smile*): Yes, that's quite simple—and quite silly. (*Moves.*) Good night.

She is now in doorway; the two men stand up and say Good night. She looks at them a moment, then nods and goes. ORMUND sits down again to resume work, but FARRANT remains standing.

FARRANT (*after a pause*): Ormud—I hope—you'll let me talk to you about the school sometime.

ORMUND: Yes, of course. Not now, though, not now.

FARRANT (*after another pause, with touch of nervous diffidence*): I'm—rather worried—— (*Pauses, and ORMUND looks at him.*) I feel—I haven't—somehow—created a very good first impression.

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ORMUND: On me—or on my wife?

FARRANT: On both of you.

ORMUND: I don't think you have, altogether.

FARRANT: Do you mind—telling me why?

ORMUND: My dear chap, I honestly haven't the least idea. So let's forget it. (*Breaking it off.*) What's your book?

FARRANT: *New Pathways in Science*. You might like to look at it afterwards. It answers a lot of questions that have been puzzling me.

ORMUND (*easily, but with an undercurrent of despair*): Yes, but does it answer the questions that have been puzzling *me*? Who or what are we? What are we supposed to be doing here? What the devil is it all about?

FARRANT: I'm afraid it doesn't.

ORMUND: I thought not. Turning in?

FARRANT (*as he goes*): Yes, I think so. Good night.

ORMUND (*back at his work*): Good night.

ORMUND *tries to settle down to his work but cannot concentrate and looks as if some despairing thought is haunting him. He looks queerly at the wall in front of him, the one he can't see. He rises slowly, and in his distress he snaps the fountain-pen he is holding in two, and as he looks down at the broken pen, the curtain falls.*

END OF ACT ONE

ACT II

SCENE: *As before. Saturday evening. Still daylight, but though the light is still good, it is that of a clear twilight. ORMUND is discovered sitting at the bureau in the window, smoking and doing some work, making notes and calculations. After a moment or two, SAM enters with a tray with bottle of whisky, syphon and glass. ORMUND looks up.*

ORMUND: Sam, you have the noble instincts of a good landlord. Thank you.

SAM (*as he puts tray on centre table*): Well, t'bar's still pretty full and I thought you'd like it handy in here.

ORMUND (*going over to the table*): Quite right. (*Takes up bottle*). But not much in this bottle, Sam.

SAM (*with a grin*): It's one you started on at tea-time, Mr. Ormund.

ORMUND: Then I must have had a very good tea.

SAM (*grinning*): Ay, you didn't do bad.

ORMUND: It looks to me, Sam, as if I drink too much.

SAM: Well, that's not for me to say, Mr. Ormund——

ORMUND: Never mind, Sam, say it, say it.

SAM: I haven't seen monny as could shift it better.

ORMUND: Nor carry it better. Admit that, Sam.

SAM: I do, Mr. Ormund. There's one or two as comes here—owd Joe Watson, farmer down t'dale, for one—who's got a head on 'em for liquor, but—by gow!—I'd back you, Mr. Ormund, against best of 'em. You'd have 'em under table i' no time.

ORMUND: Yes, Sam, and sometimes it's useful to have 'em under table. But it won't do. If I ask for another bottle to-night, remind me that I drink too much.

He returns to the bureau.

SAM: You've had your supper, haven't you, Mr. Ormund?

ORMUND: Yes. Had it with Dr. Görtler. We got tired of waiting for the other two.

SAM (*going to the door*): Ay, they're making a long day of it. Let's hope they haven't got lost.

ORMUND: Not much chance of that, is there?

THE PLAYS OF J. B. PRIESTLEY

SAM: No, not on these light nights. It's easy enough i' winter, if you stop too long on t'moors. I've known a few daffheads that did. But don't you worry. Mr. Farrant's a good head on his shoulders.

ORMUND: I don't think my wife's with Mr. Farrant. They went out separately.

SAM: Oh—well—happen she's gone a few mile further than she thought. But she'll be all right, Mr. Ormund.

DR. GÖRTLER *has come in now*. SAM *takes empty tray and goes*.

ORMUND (*after pause*): Have a drink, Dr. Görtler?

DR. GÖRTLER: No, thank you.

ORMUND (*indifferently*): Don't like too much drinking, eh?

DR. GÖRTLER (*coolly, not priggishly*): It is a kind of escape, and I do not need it. I am not afraid.

ORMUND (*with more attention*): Not afraid of what?

DR. GÖRTLER: I am not afraid of thinking, of reality.

ORMUND (*considering him, after pause*): I wonder what you think you're doing here.

DR. GÖRTLER (*with a smile*): I am asking questions. (*A pause*.) This drinking, it is an escape—from what?

ORMUND (*really dodging the question*): Well—as you see—not from responsibility—and work.

DR. GÖRTLER: No, I think you work very hard.

ORMUND: I work like hell.

DR. GÖRTLER: And that too is a kind of escape.

ORMUND (*not liking this*): Is it? But don't forget, my dear professor, I've great responsibilities. Even these people here—and their precious boy—would be badly let down if I failed 'em. I have to keep on.

DR. GÖRTLER: No, you give yourself these tasks so that you must keep on. You dare not stop.

ORMUND (*with an effort*): All right. I dare not stop.

Turns to his notes and looks as if he wanted to be done with this talk, yet cannot bring himself to break it off definitely. A pause.

DR. GÖRTLER (*with a shade of irony*): And yet—you are rich.

ORMUND (*turning*): Have you ever been rich, Dr. Görtler, or lived among the rich?

DR. GÖRTLER (*who has his own irony*): No, I have only been poor, and lived among the poor. But that is quite an experience, too.

ORMUND: I've no illusions about that. But being rich isn't simply the opposite of being poor. It's not really worth much—being rich. Half the time there's a thick glass wall between you and most of the fun

ACT II I HAVE BEEN HERE BEFORE

and friendliness of the world. There's something devilishly dull about most of the rich. Too much money seems to take the taste and colour out of things. It oughtn't to do, but it does—damn it!

DR. GÖRTLER: But power—you have that, haven't you?

ORMUND: Yes, and that's a very different thing.

DR. GÖRTLER: Ah!—you like power.

ORMUND: Well, you get some fun out of it. I don't mean bullying a lot of poor devils. But putting ideas into action. And not being at the end of somebody else's bit of string.

DR. GÖRTLER: And yet that is what you always feel, and that is why you try to escape.

ORMUND (*sharply*): What do you mean?

DR. GÖRTLER: That you are—as you say—at the end of a bit of string.

ORMUND (*as he rises and moves*): Nonsense! Do I look like—a puppet?

DR. GÖRTLER (*calmly*): No. But I say you feel like one. (*Pauses, then with calm force.*) You are rich. You are successful. You have power. Yet all the time you try to escape, because deep down you feel that your part in this life is settled for you and that it is a tragic one. So all the time you are in despair. (*As ORMUND does not reply.*) Is that not true?

ORMUND (*half-wondering and half-angry as he crosses to the sofa*): Yes—damn your impudence—it is.

DR. GÖRTLER (*pressing him*): Now please tell me why you—who have so much—should feel this despair.

ORMUND (*after a pause, turning, speaking more freely than before*): I suppose—in the last resort—you trust life—or you don't. Well—I don't. There's something malicious . . . corrupt . . . cruel . . . at the heart of it. Nothing's on our side. We don't belong. We're a mistake.

DR. GÖRTLER: But you have known—good things?

ORMUND (*looking down now at the sitting GÖRTLER*): Yes. When you're young, you snatch at 'em and then find they're bait in a trap. Cheese for the mice. One nibble, you're caught and the wires are boring through your guts. I can feel 'em there.

DR. GÖRTLER: No. It is something in yourself, something that hates life.

ORMUND: All right, it's something in me. (*Almost muttering.*) Something that's waiting to blot out the whole bloody business.

THE PLAYS OF J. B. PRIESTLEY

Moves restlessly, then finally speaks with more freedom, coming nearer and then sitting at the table across from DR. GÖRTLER.

GÖRTLER—when I was a boy I watched my mother die—of cancer. For two years she was tortured . . . she might as well have been put on the rack and broken on the wheel . . . and when she couldn't suffer any longer . . . when there was nothing left to feel any more devilish bloody torment . . . she was allowed to escape, to die. You see, there wasn't any more fun to be had out of her. Let her go.

DR. GÖRTLER: Yes, that was bad. But did she complain?

ORMUND: No, she didn't complain much. She was a very brave woman. I remember—when she could bear it no longer and screamed in the night, she'd apologise next morning. (*With terrible irony.*) She was sorry if she'd disturbed us, Görtler, she was sorry if she'd disturbed us. . . . (*Pause.*) No, she didn't complain—but—by God!—I complain.

DR. GÖRTLER: Yes, I understand. (*Pause.*) You feel too much and do not know enough.

ORMUND (*grimly*): I know too much.

DR. GÖRTLER: No. You are like a child who thinks because it rains one morning, he will never play out of doors again. You believe we have only this one existence?

ORMUND: Of course.

DR. GÖRTLER (*with irony*): Of course. We all know that now. It is so obvious. But what a pity—if we are brutes that perish—we have not the dim feelings of brutes that perish. To have this one short existence and to spend it being tortured by cancer—to be given delicate nerves and consciousness only to feel pain—that would be a terrible cruelty. It would be better that nobody should be born at all.

ORMUND: I've thought so many a time.

DR. GÖRTLER: Because you do not understand the long drama of the soul. To suffer like that, then to die young, that is not easy nor pleasant, but it is a rôle, a part—like any other brief appearance here—

ORMUND (*harshly, as he moves away restlessly*): I'm sorry, Doctor. That may mean something to you. It means nothing to me. Just so many fine useless words.

DR. GÖRTLER (*with authority and dignity*): You will please remember, Mr. Ormund, that all my life I have been a man of science, and then a philosopher. I am not a political orator. My fine words mean something. (*Pauses.*) You were in the War?

SALLY enters, hears them speaking, goes out quickly.

ORMUND (*moving*): Yes. I went all through it. My brother was killed. And before the lunacy stopped, I'd found half a dozen fellows who were nearly as good as brothers, but they never lasted long. . . . I came out of it to find the whole world limping on one foot and with a hole in its head. . . . Most of us are really half-crazy. I know I am.

DR. GÖRTLER: But when you began to forget about the War, things were better, eh?

ORMUND: No. I didn't forget, and things were worse. They were very bad indeed—when—I met my wife, Janet. Then things looked different for a time—— (*Breaks off, then resumes in more normal tone.*) Well, that's how it's been. Not very cheerful. But I don't suppose you've had a rollicking time.

DR. GÖRTLER (*quietly and with great dignity*): I lost my only son in the War—a young boy. I saw all my family and friends ruined by the economic collapse of Germany. I think it was the worry, the shame, of that period which killed my wife. And now I have seen my pupils taken away from me, and have been turned out of my university and out of my country.

ORMUND: I'm sorry, Dr. Görtler.

DR. GÖRTLER: Yet I do not hate life. I accept it all. Because you see—there is no traitor—here—— (*He touches his chest.*)

ORMUND: You think there is—in me?

DR. GÖRTLER: I do not know. I can only guess.

ORMUND (*after a pause, more freely*): Görtler, I'll tell you something I've never told anybody. All my life, I've had a haunted sort of feeling . . . as if, just round the corner, there'd be a sudden blotting out of everything. During the War I thought it meant I was going to be killed, so I didn't give a damn what I did and they thought I was a brave fellow and pinned medals on me. But when it was all over, I still had the same feeling. It's getting stronger all the time.

DR. GÖRTLER: And then, last night, when you arrived here——

ORMUND: How did you notice that? I didn't know I gave myself away.

DR. GÖRTLER: What did you feel?

ORMUND: I felt like a man staring into his grave.

DR. GÖRTLER: When you entered this room?

ORMUND: Yes, yes.

DR. GÖRTLER: When you saw your bedroom?

ORMUND (*rather impatiently*): Yes, yes.

DR. GÖRTLER: But it was worst in the garage?

ORMUND (*surprised*): The garage? I haven't been in the garage.

THE PLAYS OF J. B. PRIESTLEY

Sam put my car away last night and I haven't looked at it since—
(*stops, stares at DR. GÖRTLER suspiciously, then with urgency*)—how
did you know I kept it there?

DR. GÖRTLER: Where?

ORMUND: In the car.

DR. GÖRTLER: Kept what in the car?

ORMUND: My revolver.

DR. GÖRTLER (*significantly*): So!

ORMUND: I keep a revolver in a side pocket of the car. How did you
know that?

DR. GÖRTLER: I did not know.

ORMUND: Then why did you ask me about the garage?

DR. GÖRTLER: I wanted to know what you had felt there, that is all.

ORMUND (*after staring at him a moment, calls*): Sam. Sam.

DR. GÖRTLER: Be careful.

SALLY *enters*.

SALLY: Father's busy in the bar, Mr. Ormund. Can I get you
anything?

ORMUND: Is the garage open?

SALLY: Yes, Mr. Ormund, straight across the yard.

DR. GÖRTLER: Do you want me to come with you?

SALLY *gives them a sharp look*. ORMUND *goes out to the yard,
leaving door ajar*. DR. GÖRTLER, *who has risen, looks anxiously after
him*. SALLY *looks at DR. GÖRTLER, curiously and dubiously*.

SALLY: Oh—Doctor—er—— (*as he turns*) I don't think you said
how long you wanted your room, did you?

DR. GÖRTLER (*puzzled by this*): Yes. I said it last night, when I
came here.

SALLY (*coldly*): I don't remember. It wasn't said to me.

DR. GÖRTLER: I said I wanted it over the week-end. I could not tell,
exactly.

SALLY: Well, folks who come here usually know how long they're
staying.

DR. GÖRTLER: Yes, but I could not say. I have something to do
here.

SALLY (*eyeing him*): Something to do?

DR. GÖRTLER (*still anxious about ORMUND, not bothering about her*):
Yes, yes, something very important.

ACT II I HAVE BEEN HERE BEFORE

SALLY (*hostile*): Oh, I see.

DR. GÖRTLER (*really attending to her now*): There is no need to talk to me in this way. I have done you no injury. I am quite a harmless person, even though I am a foreigner—and was once a professor.

SALLY: And so you want to know what's the matter?

DR. GÖRTLER: Yes, there is evidently something. What have I done?

SALLY (*sturdily*): Well—seeing you've asked me, Doctor—er—I'll tell you. You make me feel uneasy in my mind. That wouldn't be so bad, but I've noticed you've a trick of upsetting other people too. And I don't like it.

She is about to turn away, when a revolver shot is heard from outside. It is a startling report. She and DR. GÖRTLER give a cry.

DR. GÖRTLER (*urgently*): Ormund!

He hurries to door and goes out. SALLY stands, a hand pressed to her side, breathing rapidly. SAM comes in hastily. You feel all these people are unusually nervous to-night.

SAM (*hastily*): What was that, Sally? Who's playing about wi' a gun so near t'house?

SALLY (*breathlessly*): I don't know. Go and see.

As SAM begins to cross the room, ORMUND enters followed by DR. GÖRTLER. ORMUND looks pale and shaken but tries to be hearty and genial.

ORMUND (*loudly*): That's all right. Hello, Sam, did it bring you out? Sorry, Mrs. Pratt. Silly thing to do—very silly.

SALLY: But whatever happened, Mr. Ormund?

ORMUND: Went to the garage to have a look at my car and remembered I had a revolver in the side pocket. Took it out to see if it was all right, and nearly got to the door when something went scampering past, making me jump.

SAM: A rat, eh?

ORMUND: Yes. Big brute. And I've always hated rats ever since they used to come snuffling over me in the trenches. So I had to have a pop at him.

SAM: Ay. Did you get him, Mr. Ormund?

ORMUND: Didn't even get him, Sam. (*He pours himself a good drink.*) Just made a noise and frightened you all. Sorry, Mrs. Pratt. Won't occur again.

SAM: Ay, well, I don't know why it should ha' bothered so much—but—

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SALLY (*cutting him short*): All right, Father, they'll be wanting you in the bar.

She gets him out. ORMUND, no longer bothering to keep up appearances, drops into a chair, takes a huge drink, then rests his head in his hands and rubs his forehead, as if both baffled and depressed.

DR. GÖRTLER: I am sorry.

ORMUND (*suddenly jumping up, with passion*): Sorry, sorry! Yes, I went into the garage. Now what do I do next? You must have some more amusing ideas. (*Going close to DR. GÖRTLER.*) Who the devil are you to come here and take the lid off my head and stick pins into my guts and say you're sorry?

DR. GÖRTLER: I am not amusing myself with you, Mr. Ormund.

ORMUND (*laying a hand on him, glaring at him*): No? Well what are you doing here? What's your game?

DR. GÖRTLER (*with authority*): It is not a game. (*He looks steadily at him. ORMUND drops his hand, moves away.*) Tell me what happened. (*As ORMUND does not reply.*) Please.

ORMUND: What I told them about the rat was true. But of course that wasn't all.

DR. GÖRTLER: No, I knew that.

ORMUND: It wasn't so bad until I took out the revolver. And I had to take it out—irresistible impulse. But as soon as I stood there with that gun in my hand, I seemed to be falling into black night, and I felt the only thing left for me to do on earth was to put that revolver to my head. How I struggled to the door I don't know, but then I had to pull the trigger. Luckily there was the rat to fire at. At least I suppose there was a rat. Perhaps not. I'm crazy enough to invent a rat or two. *Was there a rat?*

DR. GÖRTLER: I do not know.

ORMUND (*rather wildly*): Thank God, there's something you don't know. (*Tries the bottle, which is empty.*) Damn! Look at that. (*Calls.*) Sam, Sam. (*Enter SALLY.*) Oh—Mrs. Pratt—I want a drink and this bottle's dead and done with.

SALLY (*taking it*): Bar's quieter now, Mr. Ormund, if you'd like to go back there.

ORMUND: I would.

Nods to DR. GÖRTLER and goes out. SALLY remains behind, collecting ORMUND's glass and syphon. Then she stands looking at DR. GÖRTLER in an unfriendly manner, but hesitating to speak. He has been thinking, but now catches her eye.

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DR. GÖRTLER: Is there something you wish to say to me?

SALLY (*with an effort*): Yes—there is. There seems to have been a misunderstanding about your room, Dr.—er——

DR. GÖRTLER (*deliberately*): Görtler—Gört-ler. And I think the misunderstanding is not about my room, but about me, Mrs. Pratt.

SALLY (*heavily*): I said nothing about you.

DR. GÖRTLER: No.

While they are looking at one another, they are interrupted by the entrance of JANET. She is dressed for walking and looks tired. She is carrying some wild moorland flowers.

SALLY (*glad of this interruption*): Well you have had a long day, Mrs. Ormund. But I thought Mr. Farrant would be with you.

JANET: No. But he'll be here soon. Oh—I'm tired.

Sits as if almost exhausted.

SALLY: I expect you are. Well, I'll see about your suppers.

JANET: I don't want very much, Mrs. Pratt.

SALLY: What! after being out all day! That's no way of going on. You want a good meal. (*Nods, smiles, and goes out.*)

DR. GÖRTLER (*smiling*): For once, I think, Mrs. Pratt is right. You must eat plenty of supper. And it is good too. These people here—not like so many of the English now—they still have good food.

JANET (*lazily*): Yes—when I see it—I'll probably be quite greedy. But, you know how it is, sometimes when you're feeling tired, the idea of enormous platefuls of food . . . isn't . . . very attractive. . . .

DR. GÖRTLER: You walked a long way?

JANET: Further than I meant to.

DR. GÖRTLER: But it was a good walk?

JANET (*dreamily*): Heavenly . . . across the moors nearly all the way. . . . I found a sort of tiny secret glen . . . with a little waterfall . . . and mossy rocks . . . carpets of grass . . . harebells. . . . (*The clock chimes.*)

DR. GÖRTLER: White harebells again?

JANET: Yes . . . white harebells again. . . . You remember things don't you, Dr. Görtler?

DR. GÖRTLER: Only sometimes. My wife used to say I remembered nothing. But that was because I always forgot anniversary days or what to take home from shops. (*Pauses, smiles across at JANET.*) It was peaceful up there?

JANET: Yes . . . no people . . . just larks and curlews . . . very

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right down in your heart, Mrs. Ormund. If it did, it'd be kinder than it is. But it leaves you behind—to suffer.

DR. GÖRTLER (*turning*): No. All that is an illusion. Nothing has really gone, nothing is really lost.

SALLY (*impatiently*): Isn't it indeed? You wouldn't talk like that if you'd lost as much as I have.

DR. GÖRTLER (*with dignity*): I have lost more than you have. I have lost everything except the love of knowledge—and faith and hope.

He turns to go, and almost bumps into FARRANT, who enters looking dusty and tired and strained. There is a quite definite sense of strain in his manner. DR. GÖRTLER smiles at him.

So—Mr. Farrant you have had a good walk, eh?

FARRANT: Not bad.

He passes DR. GÖRTLER without a smile or a look. The effect is that of a snub.

Get me a glass of sherry, please, Mrs. Pratt.

DR. GÖRTLER (*sharply*): Mr. Farrant.

FARRANT (*turning*): Yes?

DR. GÖRTLER (*rather sadly*): It does not matter.

He goes out slowly, the other three looking after him.

FARRANT: What's wrong with Görtler?

JANET (*coldly*): Perhaps he didn't appreciate your very curt manner.

FARRANT (*rather dryly*): Sorry about that. Didn't mean to offend him.

SALLY (*as she goes*): Never mind about him, Mr. Farrant.

She goes. There is an awkward silence. Then JANET prepares to move.

JANET (*with emphasis*): Thank you for not trying to catch up to me.

FARRANT (*confused by this attack*): Oh—were you—

JANET (*cutting in as she goes*): Yes, and you know I was.

He stares after her, and mechanically takes out a cigarette and lights it. SALLY enters with a glass of sherry.

SALLY: And your supper's all ready, Mr. Farrant.

FARRANT: Thanks. I'll come along in a few minutes.

He sips his sherry, SALLY looks at him.

SALLY: You don't think you're overdoing it a bit, do you, Mr. Farrant? I mean, walking too much.

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FARRANT (*off-handedly*): I'm rather tired to-day. I slept badly last night.

SALLY: Yes, well you were sent here for a rest, y'know, and you don't want to go and overdo it. You're looking done up to-night, if you don't mind me saying so.

It is now much darker and SALLY begins to switch on the lights and draw the curtains and tidy up a little, doing this slowly as she talks and continuing until SAM enters.

FARRANT: Don't worry, Mrs. Pratt. I've always been a lot better than I looked.

SALLY: Well, you mustn't think I'm fussing at you——

FARRANT (*teasing her, nicely*): Of course you are. And don't pretend you're not.

SALLY: Yes, but I know what it is when folk first comes up here. They do too much. And we can't have you making yourself poorly again, I don't know what our Charlie would say to us. He's depending on you to see him through and so are we. And he thinks the world of you, I'm sure.

FARRANT (*as he goes slowly to the door to his staircase*): And we'll see him through. We'll have you nearly bursting with pride over him one day. I must wash.

SALLY: Shall I get you some hot water?

FARRANT: No, thanks.

He goes out. SALLY finishes tidying up the room. SAM looks in.

SAM: Well, lass?

SALLY: What was all that commotion just now in t'bar?

SAM (*grinning, and coming in*): Oh—that wor only Mr. Ormund having a bit of a game wi' owd Watson and Joe.

SALLY (*dropping her voice*): Is he drunk?

SAM (*dropping his*): Who? Mr. Ormund? Well—amount he's taken to-night he ought to be silly drunk or unconscious—I know I'd be—but you can't say he's more nor a bit wild like. By gow, he can shift it, that chap.

SALLY: And I call it a silly way o' going on. Can't you stop him?

SAM: Course I can't. It's not as if he wor daft with it. He's nobbut a bit wild.

SALLY: Well, I don't like it, Father.

SAM: No, happen not. Still——

SALLY (*continuing, unhappily*): I'm right sorry now Miss Holmes and her friends couldn't come. I can understand them sort o' folk.

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I've felt uneasy in my mind ever since last night. And I put most of it down to this Dr. Görtler. He's got everybody's back up.

SAM: Nay, it's only 'cos he's a sort of foreigner and a professor and whatnot, and talks so queer. He means no harm, Sally.

SALLY (*with sudden anger*): Harm or no harm, he leaves here in t'morning. We'll get on better without him. And I'm going to tell him so.

SAM: Now steady on, lass, steady on.

SALLY (*angrily*): What's use of saying 'steady on' when we're all getting on edge——

She is interrupted by ORMUND who enters a trifle unsteadily, a glass of whisky in his hand. He has obviously had a lot to drink, but is not conventionally drunk.

ORMUND: Sam, Sam, you're deserting us. And you've not told me yet what's going to happen to you in the next world.

SALLY (*hastily*): Mrs. Ormund's back, Mr. Ormund. She's gone to get her supper.

ORMUND (*perching himself on table*): See that she has a beautiful supper, Mrs. Pratt. Including your gooseberry pie. Don't stand any high-brow nonsense from her on that subject. She must take her share of gooseberry pie. See to it!

Waves at SALLY, who nods, smiles faintly, and goes.

Now, Sam, what's going to happen to you in the next world?

SAM: Nay, he didn't say t'next world——

FARRANT enters from his room. He is tidier than he was, but still looks pale and strained.

ORMUND: Hello, Farrant. Did you show my wife the moors to-day?

FARRANT (*rather shortly*): No.

ORMUND: Weren't you together?

FARRANT: No. I saw her. But we weren't together.

ORMUND: Why didn't you join up?

FARRANT (*rather stiffly*): I don't know. I suppose we both preferred our own company.

ORMUND: That's not very complimentary of you.

FARRANT: Sorry. I didn't mean to sound offensive. Actually, I was feeling—rather dreary, and thought I'd better keep it to myself.

ORMUND (*pleasantly*): Well, well. Sam's just going to tell me what our friend Dr. Görtler says will happen to him when he dies.

FARRANT: Well, you know what to expect. I believe Görtler's turn-

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ing mystical, like so many Germans when things go wrong.

ORMUND: He's had a packet, you know.

FARRANT: Yes, and I think it's a rotten shame. But even that doesn't excuse a man of science who's begun to talk bosh.

ORMUND: I suppose it is bosh.

FARRANT: From one or two things he said to me last night, I'm afraid it will be. Perhaps I'm too impatient with that easy, optimistic half-thinking, but it does seem to me to be poor stuff in itself and to get in the way of real thought. We shan't get out of the muddle we're in except by thinking hard and realistically. Don't you agree?

ORMUND: We shan't begin to get out of it until we really *want* to get out. What sort of thinking is going to make us *want* to get out, that's the point.

FARRANT: Well, it won't be Görtler's Teutonic mistiness, will it? I must go and eat. (*Nods and goes.*)

ORMUND (*in a whisper*): Sam, believe it or not, it was I who voted him into that headmastership at Lamberton. And now having met the young man, I don't like him, and he doesn't like me.

SAM (*stoutly*): Nay, Mr. Ormund, Mr. Farrant's a grand young chap when you get to know him. Before you came, he was great company, but this last day or two, he's happen been a bit short and sharp. I fancy he's not so well again.

ORMUND: Perhaps that's it. But now then, Sam, let's hear what's going to happen to you—let's have some bosh.

SAM: Well, it started with me saying last night: "If I'd my time over again," which seemed to right tickle Dr. Görtler. Because he comes to me this afternoon and tells me I'm going to have my time over again. He started on about time going round i' circles an' spirals, an' i' two minutes, what with his dimensions and eternities and what not, he had me dizzy. He says we all go round and round like dobby-horses.

ORMUND: God forbid!

SAM: Nay, don't say that, Mr. Ormund, 'cos I'm all for this arrangement. He says I'm one o' them that'll go on and on wi' t'same life an' nivver change. When I die, I'm born all over again, down at Marlingset, same house, same parents, go to t'same school an' have t'same fights wi' t'other lads, just t'same as before.

ORMUND: But you wouldn't like that, Sam, would you?

SAM: I ask for naught better. It's champion. I wor telling him about day I wor wed. We wor wed early an' then I took her down to Leeds—eh, an' it wor a grand day an' all—Wharfedale shining an'

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smiling all t'way down—an' Yorkshire wor playing Surrey at Headingley, an' so o' course we went—an' Brown an' Tunnicliffe an' F. S. Jackson knocked them Surrey bowlers silly—an' then we went back to big high tea at Queen's Hotel. Eh, what a day!

ORMUND: Yes, that would be worth having again.

SAM: Well, I says to him, "Nah is that day coming round again?" An' he says, "Yes, it's on its way. Same bright morning," he says, "same blushing girl," he says, "same sun on t'same fields—everything." That'll do me, I says.

ORMUND (*half amused, half serious*): Lucky for you, Sam. But does he seriously think we all just go on and on with the same life?

SAM: Ay, I think so. That's what he told me.

DR. GÖRTLER *enters. They turn and see him.*

SAM: Doctor, didn't you tell me we all went on wi' t'same life round an' round an' round?

DR. GÖRTLER: I said you might live the same life over and over again. But not all.

SAM: Well, what happens to t'others then, Doctor?

DR. GÖRTLER: Some people, steadily developing, will exhaust the possibilities of their cireles of time and will finally swing out of them into new existences. Others—the criminals, madmen, suicides—live their lives in ever darkening cireles of their time. Fatality begins to haunt them. More and more of their lives are passed in the shadow of death. They gradually sink——

ORMUND (*passionately*): For Chrtist's sake—stop it, can't you!

He goes towards DR. GÖRTLER as if to strike him, then controls himself and swings away, muttering.

I don't want to hear any more of that stuff to-night. It's getting on my nerves.

He goes out to the bar. SAM looks reproachfully at DR. GÖRTLER.

SAM: You've gone and put your foot in it again, Doctor.

DR. GÖRTLER (*staring after ORMUND thoughtfully*): Yes. Perhaps I was wrong to come here. Or wrong to speak at all of these things.

Enter SALLY purposefully.

SALLY (*decisively*): Just a minute, Father.

SAM (*lowering his voice*): Now, steady on, Sally.

SALLY (*getting rid of him*): All right, all right.

SAM goes. SALLY and DR. GÖRTLER look at one another.

DR. GÖRTLER: Yes?

SALLY: Dr. Görtler, there's been a misunderstanding about your

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room. I thought you were just staying last night and to-night and—well—I promised somebody that room for to-morrow and Monday—and it's somebody who's stayed here many a time—so—you see——

DR. GÖRTLER: You mean, that you want me to go?

SALLY: I didn't say so. I said we wanted that room.

DR. GÖRTLER: Yes, but you have nobody coming for it to-morrow.

SALLY (*sturdily*): No, but we soon can have. I said that because I didn't want to hurt your feelings.

DR. GÖRTLER: You have already hurt my feelings. But tell me the real reason why you wish me to leave.

SALLY (*with force*): Well, if you want to know, it's because I feel there's something wrong here. I don't know what it is, but I can feel it all the time. And so can other people.

DR. GÖRTLER: Perhaps there *is* something wrong here.

SALLY: Well, there wasn't before you came. And you arrived in a queer sort of way—asking who was staying here and all that. And you've got a way of talking and looking at folk that puts 'em on edge. You may not mean it, and then again you may. But I do know we'd all be a deal more comfortable if you were gone. And we think a lot o' Mr. Farrant and Mr. and Mrs. Ormund are folk o' some standing——

DR. GÖRTLER (*with sad irony*): And I am a stranger, a foreigner.

SALLY: Well, if you want to put it like that, you can do. But that's how it is. We don't expect you to go to-night, y'know.

DR. GÖRTLER (*with sudden passion*): I will go when I please. You want to be rid of me—that is enough. I will pay you now.

SALLY: Up to to-morrow morning it'll be just two days. We'll call it a pound.

He gives her a pound note and, turning away, goes to the door and opening it wide stands looking out.

SALLY (*uncomfortably*): I'm sorry—but we only want to do what's right for everybody——

DR. GÖRTLER (*half turning, curtly*): I am sorry too—for you.

SALLY (*shortly*): You needn't be sorry for me.

She goes out. DR. GÖRTLER looks out of the door a moment longer, then leaving it wide open, crosses and goes up to his room through the staircase door. The clock chimes and strikes ten. During the final strokes, ORMUND enters followed by SAM, leaving door open behind them.

ORMUND: He's not here.

SAM (*indicating the open door*): Must ha' gone out. Sally, Sally!

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SALLY *appears looking a trifle upset.*

HAS DR. GÖRTLER gone out, 'cos Mr. Ormund wants him?

ORMUND: I want to apologise to him.

SALLY (*sulkily*): He must have gone out. He's off in the morning.

ORMUND: Going? What for?

SALLY (*defiantly*): Because I asked him to go.

SAM: Nay, Sally, you didn't!

SALLY: Well, you wouldn't. You shuffled out of it.

She turns to go.

ORMUND (*with authority*): Just a minute, Mrs. Pratt. Did you really ask Dr. Görtler to leave this inn?

SALLY (*defiantly*): I did. And I'm not sorry. He's made everybody feel uncomfortable. I heard you complaining and shouting at him yourself, Mr. Ormund.

ORMUND: Yes, God help me!

SALLY: So I think I did right.

ORMUND: No, you did wrong.

SALLY: Why did I?

ORMUND: Because he's a stranger, a foreigner, who's had to leave his own country. Even if he says things we don't understand, even if he makes us feel uncomfortable at times, we ought to be courteous. God knows I haven't been. But I was hoping *you* were being considerate to him. My fault probably. I could kick myself.

SAM: Why, Mr. Ormund, I can't see it matters much.

ORMUND: It does, Sam, it does. All over this rotten world now, they're slamming doors in the faces of good men. But we've still a door or two open here. We can't bang one of them in the face of this man, who's done none of us any harm. (*Glances at door.*) He can't have gone far. I'm going to tell him I'm sorry and ashamed.

He goes out hastily, the door closing behind him. SAM looks after him dubiously, then at SALLY.

SAM: You shouldn't ha' done it, Sally.

SALLY: Why not? We've got our living to earn—and work hard enough to earn it—and we're the best judge of our own business. It's all right, Mr. Ormund talking so grand now. And how much whisky has *he* had?

SAM: I know. But he's far from being nasty-drunk, so I can't interfere. Only one as could is his wife, and it beats me she doesn't.

SALLY (*lowering her voice*): Happen she's given him up as a bad job.

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She does not say any more because JANET enters. There is a slight awkward pause.

Was your supper all right, Mrs Ormund?

JANET (*who has a strained look*): Yes, thank you.

SALLY (*motioning SAM out*): You won't be wanting anything else to-night?

JANET: No, thank you.

SAM (*rather awkwardly*): Mr. Ormund's just gone out.

JANET *nods and sits down. As SALLY and SAM are going, FARRANT appears.*

SALLY: You won't be wanting anything else, will you, Mr Farrant?

FARRANT: No, thank you.

SALLY: What about to-morrow? Will you be going out all day again?

FARRANT (*hastily*): I don't know yet. I haven't made any plans.

They all say Good night as SALLY and SAM go out. JANET and FARRANT are left silent, not looking at one another. The sense of strain is definitely felt. At last JANET can endure it no longer.

JANET: Mr. Farrant.

FARRANT (*rather startled*): Yes?

JANET: This afternoon you walked just behind me for several hours. We've just sat through the whole of supper without exchanging a word. I'm sorry, but I can't stand any more of it. If you're going to sit in here, then I'll either go out or up to my room.

FARRANT (*rising*): Please don't trouble. I'll go.

JANET (*watching him, with a touch of irony*): Thank you.

As he stands awkwardly, looking doubtfully at her, and not moving.

Yes?

FARRANT (*jerkily*): Would you mind—telling me—how long you're staying up here?

JANET: I really don't see why I should. (*Pause.*) Why do you ask?

FARRANT: Because if you're not leaving, then I must leave.

JANET (*rising*): I didn't realise you disliked me as much as that.

FARRANT: I don't dislike you. It isn't that. I'd better clear out in the morning.

JANET: But you've no right to talk as if I'm driving you out.

FARRANT: No, I don't mean that, Mrs. Ormund.

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JANET (*moving a step or two nearer*): I'm not trying to be difficult. It's simply that I find these long silences intolerable.

FARRANT (*a step nearer to her*): I know they are. I feel just the same. And I do assure you—it's quite unusual for me. I'm often accused of talking too much. But—you see—last night I never slept at all——

JANET: Neither did I, for that matter. But that doesn't excuse us——

FARRANT: No, no, I know. But then, you see, all to-day when I was out, of course I felt fagged. You must have done too.

JANET: I did. And when I came back, I felt absolutely worn out. I couldn't possibly make any effort at supper. Still, I think you might have done——

FARRANT: I tried, y'know, tried all the time. I kept—you know how one does—kept forming words——

JANET (*a step forward*): Yes, I did that too. But couldn't bring them out.

FARRANT: Exactly. And then when I came in here, the silence had gone on so long, it seemed—y'know—absolutely indestructible——

JANET: It was nearly. I had to take a hammer to it.

FARRANT (*moving a step nearer*): I'm glad you did, because I wanted to explain. You must think me a fool——

JANET (*quicker than before*): No, of course I felt you disliked me, but then with not sleeping last night and being so tired to-day, you see——

FARRANT (*eagerly, very quickly*): Yes, well, probably I'm imagining I'm fitter than I am, y'know——

JANET (*she is quite close to him now*): You look rather nervously tired——

FARRANT (*looking at her*): Perhaps we're both—y'know—not quite—our usual selves.

JANET: No.

Involuntarily she steps into his arms and he holds her closely to him. The clock chimes. A tremendous inevitability rather than a sudden gust of passion is felt here. They remain in this embrace for a few moments. They only draw their faces away to speak.

FARRANT (*dazed*): I didn't know. . . . I didn't know.

After a pause.

JANET (*whispering*): What shall we do?

He now does definitely hold her close and they kiss. They are quite ecstatic. Then before they have time to separate, ORMUND has

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entered, clearly taking in the situation. They stand a little apart, dumb.

ORMUND (*from just inside the door*): There may be a storm. And it's nearly Whitsunday—the Feast of Pentecost—the Day of the Spirit, they used to call it. And—curiously enough—they didn't mean motor spirit—quick-starting, anti-knock petrol. They didn't know about that. They didn't know anything. We know it all. Farrant knows it all and is passing on our knowledge to our lucky boys—

He breaks off, and comes forward, looking at the other two, who are still dumb.

And now what?

They are silent.

Come on then—damn you!—talk, talk, let's hear all about it.

They are silent.

I suppose you arranged to meet here. No? Then if you've got as far as this in twenty-four hours, I ought to congratulate you. It's wonderful how everything's being speeded up.

Another pause, he looks at FARRANT.

Come on, Farrant. Good God, aren't you man enough to stand up for what you're doing?

FARRANT: Ormund—I wish I could explain—

ORMUND: I can do that.

JANET: No, Walter, please. We've got to try and understand what's happening—

ORMUND (*bitterly*): No difficulty about that. In one day, while the pair of you were pretending to dislike each other, you've suddenly decided you're in love—or in want of amusement—and couldn't even wait—

JANET (*with force*): No, Walter, can't you see it's not like that?

ORMUND: How can I see what it's like?

FARRANT: Ormund, it's—simply—happened, that's all. Beyond that, we can't explain.

ORMUND goes away from them, then turns in a quieter mood.

ORMUND: All right, all right. You're neither of you in any fit state to talk, and I know I'm in no fit state to listen. You've fallen in love. You don't know why. You can't help it. That it?

FARRANT: Yes.

JANET: Can't you see we're quite bewildered and helpless? (*Pauses, then with more urgency.*) You remember what I felt last night when we arrived here, and I didn't want to stay.

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ORMUND: You think you felt then that—this—was about to begin?

JANET: Yes.

ORMUND: But you don't know how it's going to end.

Looking at both of them.

How does it end? We'd better ask Dr. Görtler.

JANET (*urgently*): Why do you say that?

FARRANT (*quickly*): He's not serious.

ORMUND: I'm in a state of mind when I've stopped considering whether I'm serious or not. Ask Görtler. Ask the devil.

FARRANT: But Görtler doesn't come into this at all.

ORMUND: Don't be too sure, Farrant.

JANET (*as if making a tremendous discovery*): He knew it had happened before.

FARRANT (*quickly*): He couldn't have done.

JANET: He came to find us here.

ORMUND (*almost in a whisper*): My God!—I'd hate to think that.

JANET: Why, what do you mean?

ORMUND: I've had one grim session with him to-night. What does Görtler know?

FARRANT (*with quick contempt*): Nothing about this.

JANET (*suddenly sinking into chair, exhausted, then speaking slowly*): I believe he knows everything about us all.

There is a pause.

ORMUND (*harshly*): Well, what do we do now?

JANET (*in a whisper*): I'm frightened.

As they look at one another in silence—DR. GÖRTLER crosses the stage from the staircase door to the door, to the open air, in a curiously detached, almost mechanical fashion, carrying his bag. He does not look at them, but they watch him in silence, staring in fascination and amazement at him. They only speak when he is nearing the door.

JANET (*in a terribly alarmed tone*): Dr. Görtler!

ORMUND (*in alarm and despair*): Görtler!

But he ignores them and walks straight out of door, banging it behind him, and they remain motionless, staring after him, and then slowly turning their eyes to one another, while the curtain rapidly descends.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT III

Sunday night. The room is empty. Late evening light. Both doors are closed. The clock chimes. After a moment, SALLY comes in and goes to telephone.

SALLY: No! I was sure I heard it. (*Over her shoulder to SAM, who is following her.*) Come in, Father, there's nobody here. Surely they can't be much longer getting that call through. It's past his bedtime now.

SAM: Well, if t'lad's in bed, he's all right.

SALLY (*sharply, she is worried*): Unless he's poorly. And how do I know he's safe in bed?

SAM: Why shouldn't he be?

SALLY: I've told you before, Father—I don't know. I expect I'm making a fool of myself. But I can't help it.

SAM: All right, lass, I'm not blaming you.

SALLY: I'm sorry, Father, I didn't mean to be short with you. And if it were anybody else but our Charlie, I'd laugh at myself for getting into such a state.

Telephone rings sharply. SALLY hastens to answer.

Yes, yes. . . . Well, this is Mrs. Pratt speaking . . . (*eagerly.*) Oh is he? Thank you very much, though I didn't mean to get poor lad out o' bed. . . . (*With marked change of tone.*) Oh, Charlie this is your mother. . . . Are you all right, lad? . . . (*With great relief.*) Well, I'm glad to hear it. I've been right worried about you. . . . Nay, I don't know. . . . I must be doting. . . . Yes, it's been nice here, except for a bit of a storm late last night. . . . That's good. . . . How many runs did *you* make? . . . Never mind, better luck next time. . . . Yes, well—look after yourself, Charlie. . . . God bless you, lad! (*She puts down the telephone and gives a great sigh.*) He's all right.

SAM: I d' didn't expect aught else. How many runs *did* he make?

SALLY (*half laughing*): You're as bad as he is. Three.

SAM: He will try and hit across, instead o' coming forward—left foot. I've told him.

SALLY: I've been worrying and worrying about that lad all day. Well, that's *one* load off my mind.

SAM: One load? How many more have you?

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SALLY: Well, I've this.

She produces a rather worn, fairly large notebook, bound in dark leather. SAM looks at it in astonishment.

SAM: Whose is it?

SALLY: That Doctor Görtler's. I found it in his room this morning. It had slipped down inside the arm-chair.

SAM: Well, you'll have to send it to him.

SALLY: How can I when he didn't leave his address? And another thing. I feel bad about sending him away like that.

SAM: I told you.

SALLY: I never thought he'd leave last night, without another word. I meant to tell him this morning to stay on, if he wanted to—after what Mr. Ormund said—he'd made me sort o' feel ashamed—and I was right upset when I found he'd gone. I think that started me off.

SAM (*with awkward tenderness*): Never mind, lass. We all mak' mistakes.

SALLY: But don't think I'm the only one who's feeling upset here. There's some worse than me—yes, here in this house.

SAM: Aye. I've hardly seen 'em to-day.

SALLY: Neither have I. But I know.

FARRANT's and JANET's voices are heard. SAM looks that way, and picks up notebook. JANET and FARRANT enter, looking very serious.

SAM: Mr. Farrant (*showing notebook*), Dr. Görtler left this behind. It had got down side of his chair, way my tobacco pouch has done monny a time. I wor just wondering whether it wor of any importance. It's i' German, I reckon.

FARRANT (*taking notebook*): I'll see.

Looks at first page, curiously.

JANET (*very curious*): What does it say?

FARRANT (*puzzling over it*): *Wiederkehr und Dazwischenkunft*. That's Return or Recurrence and—Interference or Intervention. This notebook, it says, is for problems and instances of Recurrence and Intervention.

Flicks the pages carelessly.

Yes——

Handing it back casually to SAM.

he's sure to want that back.

JANET (*who's been thinking*): What could he mean by problems and instances of Recurrence and Intervention?

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FARRANT (*shrugging*): God knows! But as I've told you before, I don't think Görtler had quite retained his mental balance. It often happens when an elderly scholar suddenly has a lot of trouble.

Turns, rather sharply, to SALLY.

Mrs. Pratt, I'm leaving to-night, so can I have my bill, please. And—Sam—would you mind getting my car out?

SAM (*surprised*): All right, Mr. Farrant. (*He goes.*)

FARRANT (*to JANET*): I'll pack now.

He goes to his room. SALLY looks after him in astonishment, then looks at JANET.

JANET: Do you know where my husband is, Mrs. Pratt?

SALLY (*gravely*): He was up in his room, Mrs. Ormund. I went in about quarter of an hour since, and he was there, writing letters.

She breaks off, then looking hard at JANET, moves a step nearer to her.

Mrs. Ormund, are you going to-night, as well as Mr. Farrant?

JANET: Yes, we're going together.

SALLY: You're leaving your husband?

JANET: Yes.

SALLY: Leaving him for good?

JANET: Yes.

SALLY (*very earnestly*): But that's a terrible thing to do, Mrs. Ormund.

JANET (*steadily*): I know it's a very serious thing, Mrs. Pratt. But it happens to be the only possible—the only fair—thing to do—in the circumstances. You'll have to believe that.

SALLY: But have you thought, Mrs. Ormund?

JANET (*with a rather wan smile*): I've been doing a lot of thinking.

SALLY: Yes, but I mean—have you thought about what'll happen to Mr. Ormund? He's your husband. And what will he do, left to himself? He seems such an unhappy sort o' gentleman with all his drinking and what not.

JANET: I'm afraid he is unhappy.

SALLY: You're not leaving him—surely—because he's taken to drinking too much——

JANET (*cutting in*): No, Mrs. Pratt. My husband always has been unhappy. There was a time when I tried very hard to make him happy, but somehow I couldn't. It was my fault, not his, probably. I just couldn't feel what I ought to have felt for him. No, it's no use.

SALLY (*very earnestly*): But Mr. Farrant too! Have you thought

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what might happen to him—with his school and everything? That's where my Charlie is, you know. And if anything did happen to Mr. Farrant!

JANET (*a trifle less sympathetically*): You can be sure I've thought about that too. We both have.

SALLY: Oh—I knew there was something wrong. Mrs. Ormund, please—I've lost my own man, and I've only this lad of mine—and I'm older than you—listen to me a minute. Don't go snatching at what you think might be happiness, when you don't really know. And please—please—don't rush off and do something you might regret all the rest of your life. We haven't just ourselves to consider, y'know, and the older you get, the more you see that. Mrs. Ormund—please—give yourself a bit more time—think it over—for all our sakes——

She is disturbed by the entrance of ORMUND. He is completely sober. SALLY gives him one look and then hurries out. ORMUND waits until she has gone.

JANET (*quietly but not without emotion*): I've just told Mrs. Pratt that Oliver and I are going away.

ORMUND: When?

JANET: We're going to-night.

ORMUND (*hopelessly*): I see.

JANET: It's the fairest and wisest thing to do, Walter—to make a clean break now, so that none of us has any more of this agony.

ORMUND: I've no doubt you're right.

JANET: We've talked it all out. We've faced the worst that might happen—even lost the school because of possible scandal.

ORMUND: You mean—you've talked about facing the worst that might happen—you haven't actually faced it yet, y'know.

JANET: Well, we've realised all that this might involve. We're not going away with our eyes closed.

ORMUND: I wonder?

JANET: Why do you say that?

ORMUND: Because I wonder how you know what the worst is that might happen. When we decided to come here together, I thought the worst that could happen would be that we'd have another of our rows. But now something much worse has happened. I'm losing you altogether. You see, we don't know.

JANET (*rather wearily*): I realise that, Walter. I only said that we tried to face the possible consequences.

ORMUND (*looking curiously at her*): You're going away. But you're not happy, are you, Janet?

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JANET (*with great sincerity*): No, I'm not. I'm miserable—and rather frightened. And perhaps it's a good thing I am.

ORMUND: Why?

JANET (*very seriously*): Because if I were all excited and feeling gay, I might be doing something foolish going away like this. As it is, I know what I feel for Oliver Farrant is absolutely real—now and for ever. I believe it's always existed, always been part of me.

ORMUND (*rather wearily*): Perhaps it has. Who knows? We know so little that's worth knowing about ourselves. We're like children groping about in the dark.

FARRANT *enters from his room carrying a suitcase, raincoat and hat. He stands stiffly when he sees ORMUND.*

All right, Farrant, all right. Only put that damned gear of yours outside.

FARRANT: My car should be there.

He crosses to the door, puts his things outside, returns immediately.

ORMUND: I was asking Janet if she was happy. She says she isn't.

FARRANT (*stiffly*): I didn't suppose she would be.

ORMUND: What about you?

FARRANT: No, of course I'm not. This is a hateful business. If I'd thought my clearing out would settle it, I'd have cleared out. But I knew it wouldn't.

JANET: And I knew it wouldn't. We've talked it all out and we've agreed on that.

ORMUND (*to FARRANT*): You're doing the only possible thing, you feel——

FARRANT: Yes.

ORMUND: You're both deeply in love. I hope I'm not overstating it.

FARRANT (*curtly*): You're not.

ORMUND: And yet you're feeling miserable about it. Why?

FARRANT (*shrugging*): I suppose it's a bad case of conscience.

ORMUND: Conscience? Come, come.

FARRANT: I believe that a man and woman, feeling as Janet and I do, have a perfect right to do what we're doing. But somewhere at the back of my mind, I've still to contend against centuries of belief that what we're doing is wrong. I'm being worried by my ancestors, as we are all the time. That's about all it is.

JANET (*impulsively*): No, Oliver. I'm sure it isn't that.

FARRANT (*surprised*): Well, what is it then?

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JANET (*struggling with her thought*): I don't know. I wish I did. But there's something—some sort of influence—behind all that we do and say here—something compelling—and tragic——

FARRANT: No, that's simply being fanciful, Janet.

ORMUND (*with savage irony*): No—for God's sake—don't let's be fanciful, not when we live in such a nice, simple, straightforward little world as this.

FARRANT (*with force*): There's no sense in bewildering ourselves with mysteries of our manufacture. People have done that too long. The point is, we're acting rationally and according to our own code, but our so-called consciences were made for us—during childhood—before we could make our own code. Therefore we can know we're doing right and yet still feel, obscurely but quite strongly, that we're doing wrong. And that's what's the matter with us.

ORMUND: And I don't believe that's the half of it, Farrant. It's all too damn simple, like a lot of your explanations.

FARRANT: But perhaps things are really much simpler than you like to think they are.

ORMUND: I suspect they're even more complicated than I think they are. (*Going nearer to FARRANT with marked change of tone.*) I don't suppose I'll ever see you again, Farrant. Let me give you one last word. Don't be too sure you know it all. Don't think you've got it all worked out. You bright young men, with your outlines of everything, are going to be horribly surprised yet. (*As FARRANT begins to protest.*) No. Another word and I've finished. Don't think you know it all, and she knows nothing. She knows more about what's going on in this crazy universe than you or I do. She doesn't get it out of books, because it isn't in books. But she can guess right, now and then, and we can't.

FARRANT: But you're not going to blame me for preferring knowledge and judgment to guesswork?

ORMUND: No, but I'm not going to have you gassing about knowledge and judgment when you can't really account for a single thing that's happened to you these last two days. You can give us nice bright simple outlines of everything under the sun, but the minute something really important happens to you, you can't make head or tail of it, and wonder if you're going mad.

JANET (*urgently*): That's true, at least, Oliver. You know we're all equally bewildered. And there's something more—something that hasn't been accounted for yet—something that perhaps can never be explained—like so many things——

She breaks off, and looks across to the doorway. ORMUND and

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FARRANT *look too. It has rapidly been growing dimmer in the room. DR. GÖRTLER's figure—he does not wear a hat or carry a bag—stands very dark in the doorway.*

ORMUND: It's Görtler.

DR. GÖRTLER (*at the door*): Yes. It is dark in here.

ORMUND *turns on the light. DR. GÖRTLER comes forward, gives a little bow to the three of them, rather casually.*

Thank you. But I am not staying—

ORMUND (*gravely*): Just a minute, Doctor. (*Goes and calls.*) Mrs. Pratt, Mrs. Pratt!

SALLY (*off*): Just coming, Mr. Ormund.

ORMUND (*to DR. GÖRTLER*): You see, you didn't give us a chance last night to say how sorry we were that you—a stranger, an exile in this country—had been treated with such discourtesy. (*SALLY appears.*) Mrs. Pratt, I'm apologising to Dr. Görtler.

SALLY (*coming forward humbly and with feeling*): Yes, Dr. Görtler, I want to beg your pardon. I shouldn't have asked you to leave. You'd done nothing wrong. I was blaming you just because you're a foreigner. I'm sorry.

DR. GÖRTLER (*rather embarrassed and touched*): No, please, please. I lost my temper too—that has always been my trouble—a bad temper—and so I behaved foolishly.

SALLY: I hope you'll stay, now you've come back.

DR. GÖRTLER: No, I cannot do that. I only came back because I have lost something—something very important—and I am hoping that I may have left it here—

SALLY (*holding up notebook*): Is this it?

DR. GÖRTLER (*taking it eagerly*): Yes. Thank you. That is all I want.

He glances at the notebook, then looks up at SALLY, and gives her a smiling nod of dismissal. She looks at him hesitantly, then turns and goes.

I would not like to have lost this. There is a great deal of valuable work here.

Turns, smiling, and makes a move in the direction of the door.

ORMUND (*stopping him*): Görtler! You're not going?

DR. GÖRTLER: Yes. Why not?

He looks at ORMUND. ORMUND looks from him to the other two.

JANET (*impulsively*): Dr. Görtler, you know something, don't you? Something that we don't know.

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FARRANT (*quietly*): That's quite impossible, y'know, Janet.

ORMUND: Is it, though? I'm not so sure.

JANET (*to* DR. GÖRTLER): You know, don't you?

FARRANT (*protesting*): Janet, really it's—

JANET (*cutting him short*): Please, Oliver! (*To* DR. GÖRTLER.) You believe that something happened here before, don't you?

DR. GÖRTLER: I know it did.

FARRANT: How could it, seeing that not one of us has ever been here before?

DR. GÖRTLER: Are you sure you haven't?

FARRANT (*very decidedly*): Of course I am. I'm quite capable of remembering exactly where I've been.

DR. GÖRTLER: Then there is nothing more to be said.

JANET: Yes, there is. Please! What do you know about us?

FARRANT: Wait a minute, Janet. We can't possibly drag Dr. Görtler into our private affairs.

DR. GÖRTLER: I have no wish to be dragged into them. (*Looks at him with a slight smile.*) Have you and Mrs. Ormund planned to leave here to-night together?

FARRANT: How did you guess?

DR. GÖRTLER: It is not guessing.

ORMUND: Görtler, I don't blame you for losing your temper. You were badly treated. But we've apologised. And things are serious here now—

DR. GÖRTLER (*coolly*): They always were—*very* serious.

ORMUND: All right then. Now—the truth, as simply as you can state it, please. You had some definite purpose in coming here, hadn't you?

DR. GÖRTLER: Yes.

ORMUND: What was it?

DR. GÖRTLER: I came to verify an experiment, and, if possible, to make a further experiment.

ORMUND: But you didn't do anything?

DR. GÖRTLER: Yes. Everything happened as I thought it would. I verified my experiment. But then, last night, I suddenly lost patience, because I felt I was being badly treated, so I did not try the further experiment. That does not matter very much. I can try that other experiment with some other example.

JANET (*urgently*): Dr. Görtler, you mean it doesn't matter to you or to your theory or whatever it is, but what about us?

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FARRANT (*impatiently*): How *can* it matter to us, Janet?

DR. GÖRTLER *looks at them indifferently. A pause.*

ORMUND (*very forcefully*): Dr. Görtler, last night you asked me a good many unusual questions—you remember?—and I told you things I had never told anybody else——

DR. GÖRTLER: Yes, that is true. You were very helpful, Mr. Ormund.

ORMUND: Now I am asking you something. It is your turn to be helpful. Why did you come to this inn? What was this experiment of yours?

DR. GÖRTLER (*after short pause*): Very well. (*Pauses, then begins in the brisk impersonal tone of the scientist.*) In this notebook are some records of very unusual states of mind and feats of memory. Some of them came to me like clear dreams. They are quite vivid little scenes. (*He rapidly turns the pages of the notebook to a place he wants, then glances at it.*) In the best of them, I remember not only what I have seen, but also what has been said. I was fortunate enough to have a very good example about three months ago. I put down all the details here. (*Looks at the notebook a moment, then at his listeners.*) In this memory—this dream if you prefer it—I found myself a year or two older than I am now, but situated as I am now, an exile living in London. I was in rooms—cheap rooms not unlike those I am in now—but here the rooms above mine, very poor rooms, were occupied by two people, a man and his wife, still quite young, but very shabby, very poor, and very unhappy. They had been quarrelling bitterly and I had heard them, and because I was sorry, I went up to see what I could do. Then, I learned their history. (*He stops. JANET stirs and draws a sharp breath.*) This was not the woman's first husband. She had been the wife of a rich man, older than herself, with whom she had fallen out of love. But they had gone on a little holiday together, at Whitsuntide, to a small inn, which they described. There she had instantly fallen in love with a younger man—the one now her husband—and they had run away.

He pauses again. JANET draws a sharp breath again and looks at FARRANT. He shakes his head impatiently.

JANET: Dr. Görtler——

DR. GÖRTLER: Then there came, out of this, as they now realised, the ruin of many innocent lives. A great business collapsed, and many people, simple people—like this landlord and his daughter here—lost their money. Not only that, but there had been a great scandal, so that this young man had been driven out of his profession, and both of them had to endure poverty and loneliness. But what made them so

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bitter was that though their love for one another had compelled them to take this course, had made them poor and lonely and neglected, it had given them nothing in return. This love of theirs, it had died.

JANET (*very sharply, painfully*): No, it couldn't have done that.

DR. GÖRTLER: Yes. They admitted that. There were too many shadows between them, too many reproachful faces. They could no longer be happy together, yet they could not be indifferent to one another, having suffered so much, so now they were quarrelsome, bitter—

JANET (*with a heart-broken cry*): Oh—God—no—not that—

FARRANT (*angrily*): But—Janet—

JANET: It was us he saw, Oliver, of course it was us.

FARRANT (*angrily*): It's only some fantastic dream of his.

JANET: No. You recognised us here, didn't you?

DR. GÖRTLER: Yes. At once.

JANET (*to FARRANT*): You see, I knew all the time, there was something—

FARRANT (*almost savagely*): Wait a minute. (*Turning on DR. GÖRTLER.*) How did you induce these dreams of yours?

DR. GÖRTLER: They weren't dreams. They were actual memories.

FARRANT: Memories of what?

DR. GÖRTLER: Of past cycles of my own life.

FARRANT: You're contradicting yourself—on your own ridiculous theory. You said you were then as you are now, an exile living in London.

DR. GÖRTLER: Why not? I have been an exile in London in past cycles of my life. We repeat our lives, with some differences, over and over again.

FARRANT: You can't expect us to believe that.

DR. GÖRTLER: My friend, I do not care whether you believe it or not. You asked me to explain and I am explaining.

FARRANT: Yes, but you're not merely airing a fantastic theory now, you're interfering in our affairs. How did you induce these states of mind?

DR. GÖRTLER: By a certain method I have developed. We have to change the focus of attention, which we have trained ourselves to concentrate on the present. My problem was to drift away from the present—as we do in dreams—and yet be attentive, noticing everything—

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FARRANT (*with savage intensity*): Yes, yes, but how did you do it? By doing without food, I suppose?

DR. GÖRTLER: Yes, to some extent.

FARRANT: I thought so. And did you use drugs?

DR. GÖRTLER: A German colleague found a certain narcotic for me——

FARRANT (*triumphantly to JANET*): I knew it. You see. I suspected that all along. He's starved himself and drugged himself and let himself be hag-ridden by a completely illogical fantastic theory of life, and then comes here with a story of some ridiculous dream he had——

ORMUND (*cutting in, quietly but sharply*): Then what are we all doing, playing such convincing parts in it?

There is silence. ORMUND moves nearer the door.

DR. GÖRTLER (*quietly*): I expected this. But it was you who asked me to explain. I have given you my explanation.

JANET (*with a sort of quiet despair*): I believe it's true.

FARRANT (*angry and resentful*): Janet, you can't.

JANET: Yes. It accounts for so many things. (*To DR. GÖRTLER.*) But afterwards—when you had made your notes——?

DR. GÖRTLER: That was three months ago. I soon found that these things had not yet happened in this cycle of your lives—because I discovered at once that Mr. Oliver Farrant was still the headmaster of Lamberton School——

JANET: You had our names?

DR. GÖRTLER: Yes, of course.

FARRANT: What proof have we of that?

DR. GÖRTLER: I think you read German? My handwriting is not good, but you can read enough, I hope, to convince you.

He hands over the notebook, open, to FARRANT, who takes it and stares at it in amazement. ORMUND, after watching FARRANT'S face a moment, slips out quietly by door to dining-room.

You will see I had not the actual name of the inn—only an idea of the sort of place it was and its situation among these hills.

FARRANT (*handing back the notebook*): I don't understand this. Must be some sort of clairvoyance, clairaudience. I believe there are instances——

DR. GÖRTLER *shakes his head, with a little smile.*

DR. GÖRTLER: So I came here for this Whitsuntide holiday. At first, when two of you were not even expected here, I thought I had chosen the wrong year. But no. I was fortunate.

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JANET: That's why—you asked those questions——?

DR. GÖRTLER: Yes. I also found that you were all closely inter-dependent. And I saw also that two of you were so instantly and fatally attracted that you were superficially resentful of one another. It was like watching a performance of a play that one has first read carefully.

JANET (*wildly*): You're talking as if we were marionettes, with no minds and wills of our own.

FARRANT (*resentfully*): Going round and round. It's a monstrous, hellish theory.

DR. GÖRTLER: Yet—what have you felt these last two days? Have you felt you had minds and wills of your own?

JANET: No. (*Then with a sort of despairing energy.*) But—Dr. Görtler—we're not really like that. I know—I *know* we're not. We can make our own lives, can't we?

DR. GÖRTLER: Once we know, yes. It is knowledge alone that gives us freedom. I believe that the very grooves in which our lives run are created by our feeling, imagination and will. If we know and then make the effort, we can change our lives. We are not going round and round in hell. And we can help each other.

JANET: How?

DR. GÖRTLER: If I have more knowledge than you, then I can intervene, like a man who stops you on a journey to tell you that the road ahead is flooded. That was the further experiment I had hoped to make. To intervene.

JANET (*pointing to the notebook*): Recurrence and Intervention.

DR. GÖRTLER: Yes. That seemed possible, too. I discovered some things I did not know before. Two of you, troubled by memories, were instantly attracted to each other. That I expected. But the third——

JANET: You mean Walter?

DR. GÖRTLER: Yes. The one I had not met before, I soon discovered that he was a man who felt he had a tragic destiny and was moving nearer and nearer to self-destruction——

JANET (*startled*): Suicide!

DR. GÖRTLER: Yes, that was why the great business collapsed, why so many were ruined, why everybody knew the story. You told me when you left him, ran away, your husband went into the garage here and shot himself——

JANET (*looking round*): Walter! (*Sees he is not there.*) Where did he go?

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FARRANT (*pointing to main door*): Not that way.

JANET (*urgently*): Dr. Görtler, he keeps a revolver in one of the pockets of his car. Will you go and get it for me, please?

DR. GÖRTLER (*gravely*): Yes, that would be better. (*Moves towards door, and then turns.*) That is one thing to do, but there are others, more important.

JANET (*quietly*): Yes, I understand.

DR. GÖRTLER *goes out*. FARRANT *turns eagerly to* JANET.

FARRANT (*with passion*): Janet—you're not going to let that fantastic stuff of his make any difference to us?

JANET (*urgently*): But—you see, Oliver, I believe it. It explains so many things I couldn't understand before. It explains *us*—why it's all happened so quickly between us. And it explains why I've never felt happy about it, why there's been a great shadow over it all. (*Pauses, then announces quietly.*) So you must go. But I must stay.

FARRANT: Janet, if you'd told me to go last night, I'd have gone without a word. But after what we've said to one another to-day, I can't go without you, I *can't*.

JANET: You must, Oliver.

FARRANT (*pleading*): But nothing's been really changed. We're exactly the same people that we were an hour ago. If it was impossible for you to stay here with Ormund then, it's impossible now. We still feel the same about each other. Can't you see, Janet, everything's just the same?

JANET (*distressed*): No it isn't, because now we know more.

FARRANT: We know nothing. My God, Janet, you're not going back on everything we've said, everything we've planned, because of this old German's mystical rubbish?

JANET: Oh—my dear—I must. I feel it's true—here— (*Putting a hand over her heart.*) Just as I feel the truth of my love and yours.

FARRANT: But now it means tearing our lives in two.

JANET: But it's better to do that than tear so many other people's lives in two—only to find in the end we'd lost one another. And this can't be for ever, you know.

FARRANT (*bitterly*): It can for me. I happen to know I've only one life, not dozens of 'em like the rest of you. Only one, and now it's in bits— (*Almost breaking down.*) Oh—Janet—and you'll do nothing to mend it—

This is almost inaudible, as she is now trying to comfort him, with great tenderness.

JANET (*very quietly*): No, my dear, if this wasn't the beginning, then

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this can't be the end of it all. There must be somewhere—our own place, our own time. (*Taking his face between her hands.*) Let me look at you.

FARRANT (*almost mumbling*): Why? What does it matter now?

JANET: I'm trying to make myself remember every single line of your face. And I know I shan't. Very soon I shall try to see it again, and there'll be nothing but a blur while hundreds of faces that mean nothing will come between us. It's a hard world for love, Oliver. Even the memory of its face won't stay to comfort us.

Enter DR. GÖRTLER. JANET and OLIVER are now apart again.

DR. GÖRTLER: The revolver is not there now. And it was there yesterday.

JANET (*hurriedly*): Will you please find my husband—tell him I am saying good-bye to Oliver—and stay with him until I come in again? Oliver——

He watches OLIVER go with JANET through door. Before JANET has closed the door behind them, DR. GÖRTLER moves towards door to the dining-room and calls.

DR. GÖRTLER: Ormund. Ormund.

ORMUND enters looking rather wild.

ORMUND: Where are they?

DR. GÖRTLER: Out there—but they are saying good-bye.

ORMUND: Good-bye?

DR. GÖRTLER: He is going. She will stay with you. (*Pauses.*) She sent me to find your revolver, but it was not there.

ORMUND: No, because it's here.

Pulls it out of his pocket.

DR. GÖRTLER: It would be better to give that to me.

ORMUND: If I'd any sense I'd use it. No more questions that can't be answered, twisting like knives in your guts. Sleep, a good sleep, the only good sleep.

DR. GÖRTLER: I am afraid you will be disappointed. It will be a sleep full of dreams—like this. And the questions will be still there. You cannot blow them to bits with a pistol. But why should you want to try now? It is all different.

ORMUND: I don't see any difference.

DR. GÖRTLER: Your wife will not leave you now. And perhaps she will be changed a little—with a new kindness.

ORMUND: I don't want her kindness. Let her go.

DR. GÖRTLER: But now she does not want to go.

ACT III I HAVE BEEN HERE BEFORE

ORMUND: Yes, she does. But she's afraid to. And I've lost her, whether she goes or stays, so there's no difference. She can't keep me alive simply by staying by my side.

DR. GÖRTLER: No one can keep you alive but yourself.

ORMUND: And I don't want to go on living.

DR. GÖRTLER (*dryly*): I am not going to cry over you, my friend.

ORMUND (*angrily*): Who the devil asked you to?

DR. GÖRTLER: But I must remind you—there's no escape.

ORMUND: No? I suppose because you believe that if I take the jump into the dark, I'll find myself back again on the old treadmill. Well, I don't believe it. I can find peace.

DR. GÖRTLER: You can't. Peace is not somewhere just waiting for you.

ORMUND: Where is it then?

DR. GÖRTLER: You have to create it.

ORMUND: How could I? You've some idea of what's gone on in my head these last twenty years. Where's the peace coming from?

DR. GÖRTLER (*sternly*): If you must talk and act like a child, then at least be as humble as a child. If you cannot create your own peace, then pray for it. Go down on your knees and ask for it. If you have no knowledge, then have faith.

ORMUND: Faith in what? Fairy tales?

DR. GÖRTLER (*with authority and passion*): Yes, my friend—if you will—in fairy tales.

ORMUND: I've lived too long—and thought too much—to begin now——

DR. GÖRTLER: I have lived longer than you. I have thought more, and I have suffered more. And I tell you there is more truth to the fundamental nature of things in the most foolish fairy tales than there is in any of your complaints against life.

ORMUND: Rubbish! Why?

DR. GÖRTLER: Because all events are shaped in the end by magic—

ORMUND (*scornfully*): Yes I thought we'd come to that. Magic!

DR. GÖRTLER: Yes. The creative magic of our feeling, imagination and will. These are the realities—our feeling, imagination, and will—and all our histories are their dreams.

ORMUND: All very easy!

DR. GÖRTLER (*with passion*): It is not easy. Life is not easy. It provides no short cuts, no effortless escapes. Peace and ecstasy are not laid on like hot and cold water.

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ORMUND (*with savage irony*): You needn't tell me that. I know it.

DR. GÖRTLER: Yes, but you do not know—you will not understand—that life is penetrated through and through by our feeling, imagination and will. In the end the whole universe must respond to every real effort we make. We each live a fairy tale created by ourselves.

ORMUND: What—by going round and round the same damned dreary circle of existence, as you believe?

DR. GÖRTLER: We do not go round a circle. That is an illusion, just as the circling of the planets and stars is an illusion. We move along a spiral track. It is not quite the same journey from the cradle to the grave each time. Sometimes the differences are small, sometimes they are very important. We must set out each time on the same road but along that road we have a choice of adventures.

ORMUND: I wish I could believe that, Görtler.

DR. GÖRTLER: What has happened before—many times perhaps—will probably happen again. That is why some people can prophesy what is to happen. They do not see the future, as they think, but the past, what has happened before. But something new may happen. You may have brought your wife here for this holiday over and over again. She may have met Farrant here over and over again. But you and I have not talked here before. This is new. This may be one of those great moments of our lives.

ORMUND: And which are they?

DR. GÖRTLER (*impressively*): When a soul can make a fateful decision. I see this as such a moment for you, Ormund. You can return to the old dark circle of existence, dying endless deaths, or you can break the spell and swing out into new life.

ORMUND (*after a pause, staring at DR. GÖRTLER, then with a certain breadth and nobility of manner*): New life! I wish I could believe that. They've never told me yet about a God so generous and noble and wise that he won't allow a few decisions that we make in our ignorance, haste and bewilderment to settle our fate for ever. Why should this poor improvisation be our whole existence? Why should this great theatre of suns and moons and starlight have been created for the first pitiful charade we can contrive?

DR. GÖRTLER: It was not. We must play our parts until the drama is perfect.

ORMUND (*very slowly*): I think what I've resented most is that the only wisdom we have is wisdom after the event. We learn, but always too late. When I was no longer a boy, I knew at last what sort of boy I ought to have been. By the time we are forty, we know how to

ACT III I HAVE BEEN HERE BEFORE

behave at twenty. Always too late. So that the little wisdom we get is useless to us.

DR. GÖRTLER (*very quietly*): In your world. Not in mine.

ORMUND *stands erect, but with his head bowed for a moment.*

DR. GÖRTLER *watches him in silence, without moving. Finally*

ORMUND *slips the revolver into his pocket and looks up, obviously having arrived at decision.*

Well?

ORMUND (*very quietly*): At least we can improve on this Whitsuntide drama of yours. I'll live. (*Pauses.*) But on nobody's self-sacrifice. Ask my wife to come in here for a moment. I can't talk to her out there with Farrant. And please tell Farrant to stop out there.

DR. GÖRTLER *nods and goes.* ORMUND *takes out the revolver and begins unloading it, then pockets it again as JANET slowly enters, and looks anxiously at him.*

JANET (*quietly*): I was just saying good-bye to Oliver.

ORMUND: Yes.

JANET: You understand—I'm not leaving you now.

ORMUND: You love him. He loves you. You are certain of that.

JANET: Yes, absolutely certain.

He looks at her gravely for a moment, turns away restlessly, then swings round, almost savagely.

ORMUND: Go on then. Go with him.

JANET (*suddenly lighting up with great hope*): Walter! (*Then she realises it could not work, and the eagerness and light go.*) I couldn't—you see—not now when I know——

ORMUND (*harshly*): You don't know. How could you?

JANET: Dr. Görtler said——

ORMUND (*cutting in sharply*): These are our lives, not his. Go, I tell you. There'll be no suicide, no scandal, no disasters. Everything'll go on. You can depend on me.

JANET (*with growing excitement and eagerness*): Oh—Walter—are you sure? If only I could——

ORMUND (*with a touch of impatience*): I tell you it's all right. Farrant's only got to take you away now for a little time, perhaps abroad, and then go quietly back to his work. And whatever happens I'll see he's not howled out of his school.

JANET (*she is radiant now, and speaks confusedly*): Walter—I can't—is it really true?—oh, I can't talk—I'm too happy——

ORMUND (*with a touch of bitterness*): Yes, I never remember seeing you so happy before.

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JANET (*eagerly*): It's not just for myself—or even for Oliver—but for you too, Walter. You've changed everything now.

ORMUND (*with a slight effort*): All right, keep on being happy then, Janet. You were meant to be happy, to be radiant. I always wanted you to be—but somehow it didn't work. Now—it seems—it's working.

JANET (*looking at him, slowly, with great affection*): Walter—something tremendous has happened to you——

ORMUND: I wonder.

Looks at her, then slowly smiles.

JANET: Yes. You're suddenly quite different. And yet—as you always ought to have been. I know now—you're bigger than I am—bigger than Oliver. I think—now—you'll be a great man, Walter.

ORMUND: Not a chance. I'll never be a great man. There aren't many of them, and you have to stand a long way off to see their true size. Perhaps I'm at last—a man—a real man—and not a mere bundle of fears and self-indulgences.

JANET: That's not how I shall think of you. What will you do now?

ORMUND: Stay here to-night, probably to-morrow night, too. And try and think. I've never done much real thinking. I've always been afraid to.

SALLY *enters, hesitantly and anxiously*. ORMUND *turns and sees her*.

Oh—Mrs. Pratt—ask Sam to put Mrs. Ormund's things in the car outside.

SALLY: Your car?

ORMUND: No, Mr. Farrant's. (*As she stops and looks troubled and anxious, he adds gently.*) Everything will be all right, Mrs. Pratt. And stop worrying about that boy of yours. He'll have his chance. Nobody's going to let you down.

SALLY: Thank you, Mr. Ormund.

She goes out.

ORMUND (*quietly*): I'll say good-bye now, Janet. I won't come out.

JANET: There seem to be a thousand things I want to say now, Walter.

ORMUND: Then don't forget them. Because some day, soon, I want to hear them. (DR. GÖRTLER *appears at door*.) Good-bye, Janet. Keep on being happy.

He holds out a hand, but as she takes it she moves forward and kisses him.

ACT III I HAVE BEEN HERE BEFORE

JANET (*whispering*): Dear Walter—good-bye—God bless you!

She hurries out, DR. GÖRTLER holding the door open for her.

ORMUND *watches her go. There is a slight pause after she has gone.*

ORMUND (*very quietly*): Close that door, Doctor.

DR. GÖRTLER (*after closing door*): I too must be going now.

ORMUND (*with a slight smile*): Having concluded the experiment. (*Pause.*) I am still wondering whether I believe a word of it.

DR. GÖRTLER: It is very difficult at first, like all new knowledge.

He is staring curiously at ORMUND.

ORMUND: You look at me as a doctor looks at his patient.

DR. GÖRTLER (*calmly*): Yes, because if my theory is correct, you are now in the unusual and interesting position of a man who is moving out on a new time track, like a man who is suddenly born into a strange new world—

ORMUND (*raising his hand as the sound of FARRANT's car going off is heard*): Just a minute, Doctor. (*They listen a moment until sound of car dies away, ORMUND listening with a painful intensity.*) Like a man who's suddenly born into a strange new world, eh? Well, that's not altogether fanciful, Görtler. I feel rather like a new-born creature. Rather cold, small, lonely.

He shivers a little.

DR. GÖRTLER (*with a little smile*): Yes, it may be hard at first. But it will pass. There are a million suns waiting to keep you warm and to light your way. (*He goes towards door. ORMUND follows him slowly.*) Perhaps we shall meet again. So I will say *Auf Wiedersehen*.

ORMUND: Yes, we'll meet again. Good-bye.

They shake hands. DR. GÖRTLER goes and ORMUND stands at door looking out into the night, which faintly lights him with moonlight. As he stands there, he mechanically brings out his pipe and pouch and begins to fill the pipe. SAM enters hesitantly—pipe in hand—from the bar, and looks doubtfully and sympathetically across at ORMUND. As he clears his throat, ORMUND turns and sees him, and comes into the room, closing door behind him.

Well, Sam?

SAM (*with awkward kindness*): I just wondered—like—Mr. Ormund—whether there might be aught I could do for you—like—

ORMUND: Well, you can sit down and smoke your pipe, Sam.

SAM: Ay. (*Both men sit, they light their pipes, and smoke slowly.*) I hear them shepherds t'other side o' Grindle Top's been having a bit o' bother.

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ORMUND (*slowly*): Yes, I heard something about that, Sam.

SAM (*slowly, philosophically*): Folks thinks shepherds has a quiet life, but they have their bits o' bother, them chaps, like onnybody else.

ORMUND: Yes, I suppose they do, Sam.

They are smoking away companionably, in silence, as the curtain slowly falls.

END OF PLAY

JOHNSON OVER JORDAN

A Play in Three Acts

DEDICATED
WITH THANKS AND GOOD WISHES
TO ALL WHO SHARED WITH ME
THIS ADVENTURE OF THE THEATRE

CHARACTERS
in the order of their appearance

AGNES	NEWSPAPER BOYS
UNDERTAKER'S MAN	POLICEMAN
CLERGYMAN	THE FIGURE
MRS. JOHNSON (JILL)	BARMAN
MRS. GREGG	SIR JAMES PORKER
RICHARD JOHNSON	HEADWAITER
FREDA JOHNSON	STOUT WOMAN
MR. CLAYTON	CHARLIE
GEORGE NOBLE	MADAME VULTURE
JOHNSON	COMPÈRE-SCHOOLMASTER
FOUR SECRETARIES	GORILLA
FIRST OLD MAN	YOUTH
SECOND OLD MAN	PORTER
CLERK	ALBERT GOOP
EXAMINERS	TOM
SCHOOLMASTER	MORRISON
DON QUIXOTE	

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*First produced at the New Theatre, London, on February 22nd, 1939,
with the following cast:*

JOHNSON	RALPH RICHARDSON
JILL	EDNA BEST
THE FIGURE	RICHARD AINLEY
FREDA	VICTORIA HOPPER
RICHARD	CHRISTOPHER QUEST
CLAYTON	ERNEST BORROW
MADAME VULTURE	EMMA TRECHMAN
MRS. GREGG	VIOLET BLYTH PLATT
STOUT WOMAN	BETTY SHALE
AGNES	LOUISE FRODSHAM
TOM	GREY BLAKE

Various characters taken by: GEORGE HAYES, MEADOWS WHITE,
HENRY HALLATT, STAFFORD HILLIARD, WILFRED BABBAGE, LAWRENCE
BASKCOMB, TARVER PENNA, ALBERT CHEVALIER, JACK LAMBERT,
LARRY SILVERSTONE, MICHAEL ROSE, PAMELA BLAKE

ACT I

After some music, which begins fiercely and frighteningly and then sinks into a funereal melancholy, we find ourselves looking at the hall of ROBERT JOHNSON'S house, somewhere in one of the pleasanter outer suburbs. There is not much to be seen: a door in the centre that probably leads into the drawing-room, and on one side of it a small table and a chair or two, and on the other side one of those tall stands for hats and overcoats and sticks. What impresses us is the atmosphere in here. It is at once cold and shuttered. There is something chill and uneasy about the very light. Something is wrong; this is no ordinary morning; and then we realise what we are in for when AGNES the maid, in black and rather red about the eyes, comes in followed by two or three middle-aged persons all in black, whom she shows into the drawing-room. Yes, they are mourners, and they are about to attend a little funeral service in the house before the remains of ROBERT JOHNSON are taken to the cemetery. We gather from the murmur of voices that these mourners are among the last, not the first, to arrive.

When AGNES has shown these people in, she looks hesitatingly at the tall stand where the hats and coats are, makes up her mind what to do, then with rather furtive haste takes some things from the stand. A middle-aged undertaker's man, who spends nearly every morning in this strange atmosphere, has now entered, and, after giving a quick glance at his watch, is now observing AGNES.

UNDERTAKER'S MAN: Them things his?

AGNES (*sniffily, whispering*): Yes. I'm taking 'em out. I'm taking 'em out. I'm sure it'll upset Mrs. Johnson seeing 'em here. I know it would me. 'Ats and sticks—and he's gorn.

UNDERTAKER'S MAN (*who has to be a bit of a philosopher*): That's right. And them things lasts longer than we do, see? Makes you think a bit, that does, eh? But don't be too long putting 'em away. We ought to be starting soon.

AGNES goes one way with her little pile of hats and coats and does not notice that a glove has fallen on the floor. The UNDERTAKER'S MAN does not notice the glove because now, after looking again at his watch, he has gone the other way, only to return the next moment with an elderly clergyman, all ready for the service.

UNDERTAKER'S MAN: Along 'ere, sir. I think they're all in but the family—and the family's upstairs waiting to come down.

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CLERGYMAN (*rather impatiently*): Yes, yes. Well, we ought to begin quite soon.

UNDERTAKER'S MAN (*who often has to soothe clergymen*): Shan't be two minutes now, sir. In here, sir.

After showing the CLERGYMAN where to go, he goes off where AGNES went. The family must have been waiting for him to tell them all is ready, for now they come on, slowly, miserably, in deepest black. There is MRS. JOHNSON, whose name is Jill, who is looking so terribly distressed that we cannot tell anything about her except that she is a woman in her late forties. She is supported, physically as well as morally, by her mother, MRS. GREGG, who must be well on into her sixties and has now attended many funerals. Closely behind them come the two children: RICHARD, a nice-looking lad in his early twenties, and FREDA, a handsome girl a year or two younger; and they are both making a desperate effort to carry it off well. Just as this little procession nears the door, JILL sees the glove that AGNES dropped, gives a little cry, and picks it up.

MRS. GREGG: Never mind that. It's nothing, dear.

JILL (*who knows better*): It's his glove—all—that's left of him.

This is too much for her and she sobs convulsively. MRS. GREGG and the children try to comfort her, while the UNDERTAKER'S MAN hovers behind them.

MRS. GREGG (*who had her doubts before*): Perhaps you'd better not attend the service, after all, Jill.

JILL (*struggling to be calm*): No, mother, I'll be all right. I'm sorry. It was seeing that glove—so suddenly, like that—on the floor—as if people had been walking over it——

RICHARD: Don't think about it, Mother—please. We just haven't to think, this morning, that's all.

JILL (*still struggling*): I'll be sensible.

The UNDERTAKER'S MAN has now crossed to open the door for them, and his manner suggests that though he has every sympathy with MRS. JOHNSON, he must point out that the morning's grim programme must be got through in reasonable time.

UNDERTAKER'S MAN: They're all ready when you are, Mrs. Johnson.

So JILL makes a last effort and in she goes, with the family, while the UNDERTAKER'S MAN holds the door open, then almost closes it, and goes tip-toeing away. After a moment's wait, we hear the CLERGYMAN beginning the service in there: "I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord; he that believeth in me,

though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. . . ." But before we have time to ask ourselves what these strange words really mean, two late mourners have entered the hall. The first is MR. CLAYTON, a spruce, rotund, prosperous old gentleman, and the other is GEORGE NOBLE, a middle-aged, conventional sort of chap, both in formal mourning. MR. CLAYTON goes to the door, listens a moment, then closes it carefully, and joins NOBLE, who has been waiting hesitantly. Now they stand close together and talk in that rather sideways manner, with a loudish whisper, which indicates they are embarrassed. But they are men of the world and will make the best of it.

CLAYTON: They've begun the service in there. No good going in now, eh?

NOBLE: Rather not. Wait until it's over, eh?

CLAYTON (*nodding, then somewhat abruptly*): Can't say I mind, myself. Don't take much stock in these services, y'know. Comforting to the women, of course. Meeting in Heaven—and all that, eh? But if you ask me—when you're dead that's the end of you.

NOBLE (*who hasn't given it much thought*): I shouldn't be surprised.

CLAYTON: Like to pay last respects, though. Knew poor Johnson very well. Did you?

NOBLE: Yes. Cousin. Noble's my name.

CLAYTON: Ah yes. Mine's Clayton.

NOBLE (*with increased respect now*): I've heard poor Robert talk about you, Mr. Clayton. Chairman of the Board at his firm, aren't you?

CLAYTON (*rather glad of a chat*): Yes. Remember Johnson coming to us as a junior clerk, thirty years ago. Worked his way up steadily. We thought a lot of him. Great loss to the firm. So young too. Fifty?

NOBLE: Just about. Fifty-one, I fancy.

CLAYTON: No age at all. And went off—like that. Wasn't in bed a week. Pneumonia, of course.

NOBLE: You never can tell, can you? And I'd have called Robert a pretty careful sort of chap.

CLAYTON: So would I. Careful, steady fellow, who always understood his responsibilities. That's why we liked him. Not easy to replace, I'll tell you.

NOBLE: Bad luck all round. Happily married too. And nice boy and nice girl, still very young. All comfortable, nicely settled.

CLAYTON (*rather indignantly*): And suddenly goes—like that! And I can give him twenty years. No sense in it. No sense in it at all.

They do not say any more because now the UNDERTAKER'S MAN

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comes in and listens at the door. This reminds them that a funeral service is going on in there, and they are obviously embarrassed as they watch the man go out again.

CLAYTON (*dropping his voice a little*): Better wait outside, I think now, eh?

NOBLE (*relieved at the suggestion*): Just what I was going to suggest. Shouldn't like to be caught just standing here.

So out they go, slowly, with unnecessary caution, and now the door opens, not because the service is over but because RICHARD is there, opening it, ready to sneak away himself but also to give his sister FREDa, who is taking it very hard in there, a chance to slip out and recover. We do not see her, however, but only just catch this glimpse of RICHARD, for now the lights are beginning to fade and through the growing dusk comes the voice of the CLERGYMAN continuing the service: "For man walketh in a vain shadow, and disquieteth himself in vain: he heapeth up riches, and cannot tell who shall gather them. . . ."

Now it is completely dark and the music has begun again, but it does not continue long in that strain but changes into something quicker and fiercer. Obviously the real Johnson is not lying in that oak box which the UNDERTAKER'S MAN is now having conveyed to the waiting hearse. What is happening to the real Johnson? Just as we are wondering this, we see him. That is all we see—JOHNSON'S face strongly illuminated against a background of darkness. He is talking away in an odd confused manner, like a man in a delirium.

JOHNSON: . . . They can say what they like, but I've a high old temperature. . . . Look at the way things bend and waver and then go floating about. . . . That's not normal. . . . And corridors . . . long corridors . . . far too many long corridors. . . . I noticed some corridors when they brought me in—you can't have a big nursing-home without corridors—but not as many as all that—and not so long. . . . And a pretty penny this'll cost us before I'm out again. . . . Fifteen guineas a week for the room, at least . . . then the doctors . . . and extras—all sorts of nonsense—and charge you the earth for 'em. . . . Minute you take to your bed, money's poured out like water. . . . Lucky I've been careful. . . . Whatever happens, Jill ought to be all right. . . . Never missed paying a premium . . . good company . . . one of the biggest and best insurance companies in the world. . . . They oughtn't to try any tricks with her. . . . I'll see they don't. . . . Better write to 'em myself . . . good stiff letter. . . . No nonsense. . . . Miss Francis. . . . Miss Francis . . . want you to take a letter . . .

He appears to imagine he is back in his own office, and so calls for his secretary. In the world he is in now, a world we ourselves visit in dreams, you do not call in vain for anybody or anything, though the results are apt to get out of control. That is what happens now. We see that four secretaries, blank-faced girls all wearing tortoiseshell glasses and dressed alike, have grouped themselves round JOHNSON so that he sees one whichever way he turns. They carry notebooks, and indeed the lights that show us their faces seem to come from these notebooks.

JOHNSON: Ah, there you are, Miss Francis.

FIRST GIRL: Yes, Mr. Johnson.

JOHNSON (*rather wearily*): Want you to take a letter.

SECOND GIRL: Yes, Mr. Johnson.

JOHNSON (*making an effort*): An important letter . . . to the Universal Insurance Company . . .

THIRD GIRL: Yes, Mr. Johnson.

JOHNSON (*after slight pause, tired*): . . . "Dear Sirs . . ."

FOURTH GIRL: Yes, Mr. Johnson?

JOHNSON (*confusedly*): No, no . . . doesn't matter . . . you needn't bother, Miss Francis . . . cancel that letter.

ALL FOUR GIRLS: Yes, Mr. Johnson.

And all four quietly disappear, while JOHNSON tries to collect himself.

JOHNSON: No, no . . . letter won't do . . . that was what Mr. Clayton always said, and he was right. . . . If you want to do business, go and do it yourself, face-to-face. . . . Quite right. . . . If I want my money, no use merely writing letter. . . . They get millions of letters. . . . Only thing to do is to go for the money myself. . . . My money, isn't it? . . . All honestly earned—years of hard work. . . . Just say to them "Look here, I want my money. . . . As one business man to another what about my money?" . . . Forms to fill in—red tape—only to be expected, big company like that—enormous business—tremendous organisation. . . . May have a little difficulty . . . business man myself, so quite understand. . . . But I must have my money. . . .

As soon as he has said this, the music bursts into a fast, clattering, nattering, nervy strain, and we see that JOHNSON is now surrounded by a number of clerks and secretaries, male and female, who are all busy exchanging documents, making notes, and so on, making very quick movements in a stylised fashion. Moreover, they are lit from below, and it is not easy to see them properly and they throw big

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confusing shadows. The total effect is irritating and then exhausting, as if we had been given a whole modern business man's day within one minute. And now through the clatter comes a loud, harsh, impersonal voice from a loud-speaker, bellowing: "The time is four-twenty-five—four-twenty-five. All forms K.R.T. three-seven-nine to be returned to Room Eighty-two by four-thirty-five. All forms K.R.T. three-seven-nine to be returned to Room Eighty-two by four-thirty-five. The time is now four-twenty-six." And now the ballet of clerks hurries off. JOHNSON tries to stop the last of them but is not successful.

The whole scene is now illuminated by a hard white light, almost dazzling. It is quite a big and high room, with enormous silvery swing doors at each side, and in the middle, the only furniture it has, a tremendous silvery desk raised on a dais, with a very big swivel chair at each side and one at the back. In front is a kind of settee made of the same silvery material. It all looks very modern, efficient and opulent, and quite inhuman. Seated in the big chairs at each side of the desk are two old men, worried old men with white hair, tinted spectacles, morning coats, and the look of dyspeptic millionaires. They have forms and enormous ledger-like volumes in front of them, and they turn the pages of these volumes in a quick desperate sort of fashion. High above the desk is one of those clocks that have no works and no compassion for our frailties, and above the clock is hanging a horrible white cluster of loud-speakers.

JOHNSON, whom we now see clearly as a pleasant fellow in a dark business suit, looks at all this in bewilderment, then cautiously approaches the first old man, who is too busy to notice his existence.

JOHNSON: Pardon me, sir, but would you mind telling me——

FIRST OLD MAN (*looking up, testily*): I'm very busy, you know, my dear sir, very busy indeed.

JOHNSON (*taken aback*): Sorry! (*He goes round to the Second.*) I wonder, sir, if you'd mind——

SECOND OLD MAN (*looking up, annoyed*): What is it then, what is it?

JOHNSON (*apologetically*): Well, you see, I don't seem to remember how I got here——

FIRST OLD MAN *looks up and makes a tut-tutting noise.*

I was in bed—as a matter of fact I wasn't feeling very well—had quite a temperature—and then—well——

SECOND OLD MAN (*who has no time for this stuff*): Then what?

JOHNSON (*who cannot help being vague about it*): Well, that's all I remember. Must have slipped out somehow and come along here.

Loss of memory, I suppose. Nuisance! Making a fool of myself! Don't even know what I want here.

FIRST OLD MAN (*who does not need even to look up for this*): Of course you do. You want your money. Wouldn't be here if you didn't.

JOHNSON: My money?

FIRST OLD MAN (*now condescending to look up*): Yes, of course. You want your money. I want *my* money.

SECOND OLD MAN (*who won't be left out*): And I want *my* money.

FIRST OLD MAN: We all want our money, don't we? Come, come, don't be childish, my dear sir.

JOHNSON (*apologetically*): Sorry! But you see—I can't remember. I was ill, y'know—really ill. I overheard the doctor—

FIRST OLD MAN: Don't bother me with doctors. Plenty here if you want one.

SECOND OLD MAN: Wonderful medical staff here. But they won't get you your money, will they?

FIRST OLD MAN (*willing to stop work for a chat about money*): How much are you expecting?

JOHNSON (*who cannot help feeling that this is pretty good*): Oh—well—several thousands, y'know.

FIRST OLD MAN (*contemptuously*): Several thousands!

SECOND OLD MAN (*perhaps the worse of the two, sniggering*): One thousand, two thousand, three thousand!

The two ancient and desiccated monsters cackle together and point contemptuously at poor JOHNSON, who watches them spread themselves in their chairs now.

JOHNSON: I don't see anything particularly funny about it.

FIRST OLD MAN: I cleared two hundred and fifty thousand on Consolidated Copper.

SECOND OLD MAN: I made a cool three hundred and fifty thousand out of National Nickel.

FIRST OLD MAN: I netted four hundred and fifty thousand out of International Iron.

SECOND OLD MAN: I cashed in for five hundred and fifty thousand out of Standard Steel.

FIRST OLD MAN (*to finish this off*): I wrote to the directors here and told 'em that to save time I'd accept, in settlement of my claim, one million and seven hundred and fifty thousand.

SECOND OLD MAN (*to go one better*): "Gentlemen," I wrote, "we

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are men of few words. I'll make no further demands on you if you give me your cheque for two millions."

JOHNSON, *who has been sitting on the settee in front of the desk, turning to listen to first one and then the other, is now only about half the size he was at the beginning of this duet. He rises and walks round to the back of the desk, regarding the two old men with bewildered awe.*

JOHNSON: Well, of course, I don't wonder you were amused. This is big business, altogether out of my depth. I've heard and read about these transactions, but I've never been mixed up in them. You see, the firm I've been with all the time is just an old-fashioned firm of East India merchants—a good sound business, of course—but——

FIRST OLD MAN (*who has been looking at his form, and now interrupts ruthlessly*): What was the National Debt in Nineteen Hundred and Seven?

JOHNSON (*bewildered*): I don't know. Why?

FIRST OLD MAN (*consulting his form*): It says here—question thirty-four in sub-section K.—deduct your personal expenditure for the first quarter of Nineteen Hundred and Seven from the National Debt of that year—but see Note 645 D. (*He looks for this.*) Omit in calculation of Debt half-yearly interest due on Consols. But see note on repayment of Indian Loans. (*He searches wildly, then cries in despair.*) I'll never do it. They know I'll never do it. They want to keep my money.

JOHNSON, *who is now sitting in the chair at the back of the desk, stares at him in amazement, while the worried old man turns pages over and plunges wildly into calculations. The second one now raises a despairing voice.*

SECOND OLD MAN: Brazilian Railways! Brazilian Railways! Add all dividends to British investors in Brazilian Railways from 1895 onwards. (*Turning to form again.*) But omit all earnings of Anglo-Brazilian Investment Corporation. (*Adds in despair to the other two.*) There won't be time again, you'll see. Then I'll have to start all over again, with another form—quite different.

FIRST OLD MAN (*miserably*): They're determined to keep our money.

SECOND OLD MAN (*suddenly changing his tone*): What are you going to do with your money when you do get it?

FIRST OLD MAN (*looking up, not uninterested*): I'm going to—er—to—oh, there was something—but I've forgotten.

SECOND OLD MAN (*proudly*): I have the second-best collection of

Eighteenth Century French snuff-boxes in the world. Museum pieces all of them.

FIRST OLD MAN (*testily*): You told me. Let's get on, let's get on. No time to waste. (*And they plunge into work again.*)

VOICE FROM LOUD-SPEAKER: Only seventeen more minutes for Forms G.T.O. Seventy-six to Four hundred and nine. Only seventeen more minutes for Forms G.T.O. Seventy-six to Four hundred and nine.

FIRST OLD MAN (*wildly*): Did they say from Seventy-six to Four hundred and nine?

JOHNSON: Yes.

FIRST OLD MAN: Mine's G.T.O. Three-twenty-five. That means I've only seventeen more minutes.

VOICE FROM LOUD-SPEAKER (*with sharp hint of correction*): Sixteen and a half minutes. (*The old man works like fury.*) Robert Johnson!

JOHNSON (*startled, jumping up*): Yes?

He looks at the loud-speaker as if expecting a reply from it, but what happens is that a clerk, not one of the posturing youngsters we have seen already but a solid, middle-aged, authoritative fellow, marches in, moving straight towards the SECOND OLD MAN, who is also buried in his ledger and forms.

JOHNSON (*noticing the CLERK*): Oh—I say——

CLERK (*firmly*): Just a minute, please. (*To the SECOND OLD MAN.*) Have you completed your form of application?

SECOND OLD MAN (*desperately*): Nearly, nearly, shan't be a minute, shan't be a minute. I'm not as young as I was, remember. My eyes bother me. Yes, don't forget that.

He tries to retain the form, but the CLERK firmly takes it from him and looks at it with contempt.

CLERK: You'd better come with me. (*The old man rises sadly.*)

VOICE FROM LOUD-SPEAKER (*severely*): All reference books to be returned to the office library.

The SECOND OLD MAN takes up his ledger and follows the CLERK out. JOHNSON watches all this with growing dismay. The FIRST OLD MAN, who has been working very hard with his form and huge volume, is now suddenly triumphant.

FIRST OLD MAN: I've got it. At last I've got it.

But one of the young clerks, repeating the phrase about reference books going back to the library, hurries in to take the book from the FIRST OLD MAN, who flings down his form and pen and buries his head in his hands in complete despair.

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JOHNSON (*with concern*): Look here, can I do anything for you?

FIRST OLD MAN (*looking up, cynically*): What! And then claim a share in my money. Not likely! You don't catch me that way. Oh no!

JOHNSON (*indignantly*): I didn't want to catch you. And I don't want your money.

FIRST OLD MAN: That's what *you* say. And then you wouldn't want a twenty-five per cent interest afterwards, would you? Oh no, not at all! My dear sir, I'm a business man, and I learned how to look after myself before you were born.

JOHNSON (*beginning to be sceptical*): I wonder.

VOICE FROM LOUD-SPEAKER: Forms G.T.O. Three hundred to Three hundred and fifty, whether completed or not, must be returned at once to Room Forty-nine.

FIRST OLD MAN (*desperately*): I won't go. I won't go.

But now the CLERK enters, carrying a long form, and looks sternly at the old man.

CLERK (*firmly*): Room Forty-nine.

FIRST OLD MAN: No. This is the hundred and seventeenth time.

CLERK: Room Forty-nine at once, please.

The old man goes out wearily and the CLERK is following him when he is stopped by JOHNSON, who is now losing his patience.

JOHNSON: Now—look here—

CLERK (*briskly, consulting form*): Robert Johnson?

JOHNSON: Yes, that's my name.

CLERK (*checking details from the form*): Aged fifty. Married and two children, son and daughter. Manager for Messrs. Bolt, Cross and Clayton, East India Merchants.

JOHNSON: Yes. But—

CLERK (*cutting in*): Here's your form.

He hands over the form, then turns away, but this is not good enough for JOHNSON, who stops him, not far from one of the big office doors.

JOHNSON (*with the remnant of his patience*): Just a moment, please.

CLERK (*unpleasantly*): We're busy here, you know, very busy. Listen!

He opens the nearest door, and we hear the clatter of a very large office—typewriters, adding machines, ringing of bells, etc. But now JOHNSON really loses his temper.

JOHNSON (*shouting angrily*): I don't care how busy you are. I want to know something.

CLERK (*very civil now*): Certainly, Mr. Johnson. What is it?

JOHNSON: I want to know where I am. What is this place?

CLERK: Central offices of the Universal Assurance and Globc Loan and Finance Corporation. Where you get your money.

JOHNSON (*remembering*): Ah—yes, of course. My money.

CLERK (*smiling*): We all have to have money, haven't we? Can't do without that.

JOHNSON (*rather confusedly*): No, of course not. But—the trouble is, you see—well, I must have lost my memory. . . . I've been ill. . . . I was in bed—yes, in a nursing home . . . doctors coming all the time . . . two nurses . . . everybody looking worried. . . . I must have wandered out somehow. . . .

CLERK (*with the air of one dealing with a child*): Quite so. Well, all you have to do is to fill in your form properly and then we give you your money. You can't get out of here until you have your money, so of course you have to stay here until you've filled in your form properly.

JOHNSON (*rather dubiously*): Yes—well—that's reasonable enough. Filled in plenty of forms in my time—all kinds—(*glances at the huge form in his hand.*) Pretty elaborate sort of thing, though—isn't it? Complicated questions. Is—er—all this necessary?

CLERK: Most certainly. You must concentrate, Mr. Johnson, concentrate.

JOHNSON: I'll do my best.

CLERK: And our examiners will be here in a moment.

JOHNSON (*who doesn't like the sound of this*): What examiners?

CLERK: For the usual preliminary questions. Meanwhile, Mr. Johnson, I advise you to take a good look at your form.

He goes out. JOHNSON walks slowly to the chair at the back of the desk, sits down and stares in bewilderment at the pages of complicated questions. As he stares he pulls a pipe out and sticks it into his mouth. Immediately the voice from the loud-speaker says severely: "No smoking in the office before five-fifteen." After giving the loud-speaker a startled glance, JOHNSON puts the pipe away. He tries to apply himself to the form, but now the lights change, the ballet of clerks and secretaries comes rushing in, making strange shadows, and we hear again their strident nervous music. When these clerks and secretaries have gone and the brilliant white lights pour down on the desk again, we discover that the EXAMINERS have arrived, and are standing one on each side of JOHNSON, who is still seated. They are exactly alike, these EXAMINERS,

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tall and rotund figures, dressed in frock-coats, with bald pink heads and round pink shaven faces and large spectacles. They carry notebooks. JOHNSON looks at them in astonishment touched with horror, as well he might.

FIRST EXAMINER (*announcing himself*): First Examiner.

SECOND EXAMINER (*announcing himself*): Second Examiner.

FIRST EXAMINER: Robert Johnson?

JOHNSON: Yes.

SECOND EXAMINER (*glancing at his notes*): Born in Grantham Street, Longfield?

JOHNSON: Yes.

FIRST EXAMINER (*reading from his notes*): Elder son of Frederick Johnson, solicitor's clerk, who for more than ten years sacrificed a number of personal comforts and pleasures in order to give you a good education?

JOHNSON (*staggered*): Yes, I suppose he did. He—was a good father.

SECOND EXAMINER: Did you ever thank him for those sacrifices?

JOHNSON (*rather shamefaced*): No. And I ought to have done.

SECOND EXAMINER (*referring to his notes*): Your mother, Edith Johnson, I see, died of peritonitis at a comparatively early age. She was warned that an operation was necessary but refused to have one in time because she was afraid of the expense and the trouble it would cause her husband and children. You knew that, of course?

JOHNSON (*deeply troubled*): No—I didn't. I—I—sometimes wondered—that's all.

FIRST EXAMINER (*glancing at his notebook, relentlessly*): And yet you have referred to yourself at times, I see, as a good son.

JOHNSON (*thoroughly uncomfortable*): I only meant—well—we all seemed to get on together, y'know—not like some families. They were very decent to me. I've always admitted that. (*Hesitantly.*) As a matter of fact, I've been thinking about all that . . . just lately. . . . I remember, just after I was taken ill—

SECOND EXAMINER (*briskly*): Yes now—you were taken ill.

JOHNSON (*brightening up, for we are all proud of our illnesses*): Yes. Quite suddenly. A most extraordinary thing—but—

FIRST EXAMINER (*cutting in, ruthlessly*): You have occupied a responsible position for some time?

JOHNSON (*bewildered and rather sulky*): Yes, I suppose so.

SECOND EXAMINER (*severely*): You are a husband—and a father?

JOHNSON: Yes.

FIRST EXAMINER (*severely*): What care have you taken of your health?

JOHNSON (*apologetically*): Well—I've always tried——

FIRST EXAMINER (*ignoring him*): The heart, the lungs, the liver and kidneys, the digestive system, the intestinal tract.

SECOND EXAMINER: The abdominal wall must be firm—no sagging.

FIRST EXAMINER (*who now sits on the desk, facing JOHNSON*): The teeth need the greatest care. Particles of decaying food lodged in dental cavities may produce a septic condition.

SECOND EXAMINER (*also sitting*): Eye-strain is common among sedentary workers. How often have you given yourself a boracic eye-bath or had your sight examined?

FIRST EXAMINER: Alcohol and rich starchy foods must be avoided. Have you avoided them?

SECOND EXAMINER: Smoking leads to nicotine poisoning and may easily ruin the digestion.

FIRST EXAMINER: Everywhere you go, you risk infection.

SECOND EXAMINER: But the common cold, the beginning of many serious ailments, may be traced to a lack of fresh air.

FIRST EXAMINER: Few of us take the trouble to walk properly.

SECOND EXAMINER: Or to sit properly. You should always sit upright, not allowing the spine to be curved. Learn to sit properly.

The wretched JOHNSON, who has been slumped deep into his chair, now sharply raises himself to a more erect position, but it does not help him.

FIRST EXAMINER: But take care to relax. The nervous strain of modern life demands constant and complete relaxation. Loosen those tense muscles.

JOHNSON (*slumping again, but determined to protest at last*): Now—look here—just a minute——!

SECOND EXAMINER (*very severely, rising*): Please—we have no time to waste.

The two monsters make rapid and contemptuous notes in their books, while JOHNSON regards them helplessly.

FIRST EXAMINER: You owe it yourself, to your wife and family, to your employer and fellow workers, to your country, to take sufficient exercise.

JOHNSON (*who mistakenly feels on safer ground here*): I've always enjoyed taking exercise. Tennis and golf——

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SECOND EXAMINER (*very severely*): Too many middle-aged men, sedentary workers, imagine they can improve their physical condition by rushing into games at the week-end, and only succeed in straining their hearts.

JOHNSON (*desperately*): I've tried not to overdo it, and every morning, if I wasn't too late, I did a few exercises in my bedroom—

FIRST EXAMINER (*very severely*): Nearly all systems of home exercises, devised by professional strong men without expert physiological knowledge, are liable to do more harm than good.

SECOND EXAMINER: Consult your doctor first. *He* knows.

FIRST EXAMINER: But the habit of flying to the doctor on every trivial occasion is dangerous and must be avoided.

JOHNSON (*sinking fast now*): Look here, gentlemen, all I can say is—I've tried to do my best.

SECOND EXAMINER (*going right up to him, in smooth deadly tone*): Possibly. But is your best good enough?

FIRST EXAMINER (*with the same horrible technique*): After all, what do you *know*?

SECOND EXAMINER (*severe again now*): How far have you tried to acquaint yourself with the findings of chemistry, physics, biology, geology, astronomy, mathematics?

FIRST EXAMINER: Ask yourself what you know about the Mendelian Law, the Quantum Theory, Spectral Analysis, or the behaviour of Electrons and Neutrons.

SECOND EXAMINER: Could you explain Freud's theory of the Id, Marx's Surplus Value, Neo-Realism, Non-representational Art, Polyphonic Music?

FIRST EXAMINER: Or—give an exact account of the sequence of events leading up to the outbreak of war in 1914?

SECOND EXAMINER (*with dangerous easiness*): You were taught French at school?

JOHNSON: Yes.

SECOND EXAMINER (*turning like a tiger*): Have you ever brushed up your French?

JOHNSON (*desperately*): No, but I've always been meaning to. Hang it!—a man can't do everything—

FIRST EXAMINER (*calmly and maddeningly*): A postman in South-East London taught himself to speak eight foreign languages fluently in his spare time.

SECOND EXAMINER (*in the same tone*): A cinema operator in Pasa-

dena, California, recently received an honours degree in natural sciences.

JOHNSON (*wearily, almost brokenly*): I know, I know. And good luck to them. But as I told you—

FIRST EXAMINER (*very severely*): Kindly tell us what we ask you to tell us. We have no time now for general conversation. You have two children?

JOHNSON (*brightening up, for this may let him out*): Yes. A boy and a girl.

SECOND EXAMINER: You are fond of them?

JOHNSON (*indignantly*): Of course I am.

FIRST EXAMINER: What serious thought have you ever given to their education, to their mental development, to their emotional and spiritual life?

SECOND EXAMINER: They are the citizens of the future, the inheritors of a great empire—

JOHNSON: I know, I know. I've often thought of that.

SECOND EXAMINER (*pressing him*): Really thought about it, or merely, after an unnecessarily heavy meal accompanied by alcohol, congratulated yourself that these children were an extension of your own ego?

FIRST EXAMINER: You have helped to bring them into the world, but what kind of world have you brought them into?

JOHNSON (*hastily, hoping he is now on firmer ground*): Oh—well—I've no illusions about that—

SECOND EXAMINER (*angrily*): We are not asking you about your illusions. For many years now you have had a vote?

JOHNSON (*still hoping*): Yes, and I've always used it—not like some chaps—

FIRST EXAMINER: But how much of your time and serious attention have been given to the problems that must be studied by a wise member of the electorate?

SECOND EXAMINER: For example, the Gold Standard as against an artificial currency based on the balance of trade. The relation between nationalism and Tariffs. The fallacy of colonial exploitation.

FIRST EXAMINER: What account of any value could you give of the political significance of minorities in Central Europe, the importance of the Ukraine in European affairs, the success or failure of Stalin's second Five Year Plan?

SECOND EXAMINER: Could you define accurately Fascism?

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FIRST EXAMINER: National Socialism?

SECOND EXAMINER: Russian Communism?

JOHNSON (*a rebel at last, jumping up*): No. Could you? (*As they do not reply, but make notes.*) I might as well tell you, I've had enough of this. Who are you, anyhow? (*As they do not reply, but look at each other significantly.*) I don't even know why I'm here. Loss of memory—or something. No reason why I should stay.

FIRST EXAMINER (*ignoring this outburst*): Your form, please.

He takes the form, hastily makes some marks on it, then hands it back.

JOHNSON (*angrily*): I don't want the thing.

JOHNSON *throws the form on the table and sits sulking. The two EXAMINERS look at the form, then at him, give a nod to each other, and go off through one of the big office doors.*

JOHNSON: I'm not staying, y'know. Why should I? I didn't want to come here. Keep your money.

But the EXAMINER has gone. JOHNSON sits slumped in his chair behind the desk, a sulky rebel. And now the hard white lights go down, and a mysterious and rather ghostly light hovers over a small door that is not really in the office at all but much nearer to us, in fact in the false proscenium. There is one of these doors at each side of the false proscenium. Through this one, then, in the queer light enter the CLERK we have seen before and a miserable woman very poorly dressed. For a moment we do not recognise her as JILL JOHNSON.

CLERK (*indicating JOHNSON*): Is that the man?

JILL (*who talks now in an angry whine*): Yes, that's my husband.

JOHNSON (*astonished*): Why—Jill!

JILL (*ignoring him*): Yes, that's him. And look at him—doing nothing! And look at us—his wife and children—turned out of house and home—not a bite to eat all day. And why? Because my husband isn't man enough to do a decent day's work.

JOHNSON (*protesting*): But—Jill—I—

JILL (*shrilly, a virago now*): Don't Jill me, Robert Johnson. I wish to God I'd never set eyes on you—and wish those poor children of mine—had never—never—been born.

She is crying now, and as her voice dies away so she too seems to melt away. But the CLERK remains, to stare accusingly.

CLERK (*in a large maddening tone*): So that's the kind of man you are, is it, Johnson?

JOHNSON (*half bewildered, half angry*): No, it isn't. I'm not like that at all. (*He goes down.*) Here—Jill—

But JILL disappeared several moments before and now the CLERK has gone and the light has changed. JOHNSON returns slowly and miserably to his seat behind the desk.

VOICE FROM LOUD-SPEAKER: All application forms to be completed within the next fifteen minutes. Only fifteen minutes more.

But before JOHNSON can apply himself properly to the task of filling in the form, the irritating ballet of clerks and secretaries is back again, hiding JOHNSON from us and throwing gigantic shadows on the back wall. When they have gone and the hard white light is blazing away again, we discover that standing over JOHNSON is the schoolmaster he always disliked the most, the very same man wearing his chalky M.A. gown and mortar-board, and as of course he has come out of the past nearly forty years ago, he has a rather old-fashioned look. As soon as JOHNSON looks up, startled, to see this hateful figure, he becomes a sulky schoolboy again.

SCHOOLMASTER (*one of those sarcastic fellows*): You'll not be terribly surprised to learn, Johnson, that I'm not pleased with you.

JOHNSON (*raising a schoolboy hand*): Honestly—sir—it's not my fault. You see—

SCHOOLMASTER: No excuses, please, Johnson. I hear too many, and I've been hearing them for thirty-five years, and yours are among the worst I've ever heard. Now—if it isn't boring you, Johnson, for I know how easily bored you become—might I ask, as a special favour, if you remember a certain wise saw I am in the habit of repeating?

JOHNSON (*who loathes the thing*): Attention to work is the secret of progress.

SCHOOLMASTER: Right. Attention to work is the secret of progress. But your trouble, Johnson, is that you don't attend to work. You don't seem to attend to anything very much, these days, do you? Mr. Morrison tells me he's dropping you out of the House Eleven because you won't attend even there. No doubt you're busy on the playing field thinking about the work you ought to have done for me.

JOHNSON (*who feels there is something in this*): Well, sir, honestly it is a *bit* like that—

SCHOOLMASTER: I said no excuses, Johnson. And now, just to make sure you *do* attend to something for once, you'll spend the rest of this afternoon writing me an essay on the causes of the Thirty Years War.

JOHNSON: Oh—but—sir—!

SCHOOLMASTER (*firmly*): The causes of the Thirty Years War, thank you, Johnson.

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He sweeps out majestically. JOHNSON, still the schoolboy, looks in that direction and makes a rude face and a rude noise. We can just hear him muttering to himself: "Old pig! Thirty Years War—oh—golly! Causes of the Thirty Years War." But then as he stares at the table in front of him, he is first puzzled and then relieved, suddenly remembering that he is not a schoolboy any longer. No, he certainly isn't a schoolboy, but how far does that take him? What is he now? We can see him asking himself these questions, still bewildered.

VOICE FROM LOUD-SPEAKER: All applicants with forms still not completed must hurry now. Only a few minutes left.

As JOHNSON tries to settle down with his form again, two typical newspaper "boys" come hurrying on, one at each side of the desk, and begin calling out in their usual style.

FIRST NEWSPAPER BOY: All abou' the big dee-saster.

SECOND NEWSPAPER BOY: All abou' the 'orrible mur-dcr.

FIRST NEWSPAPER BOY: All abou' the Cri-sis.

SECOND NEWSPAPER BOY: All abou' the fall o' Peking, Barcelona, Madrid.

FIRST NEWSPAPER BOY: All abou' the end o' Rome, Vienna, Berlin, Paris.

SECOND NEWSPAPER BOY: All abou' the burning o' London.

FIRST NEWSPAPER BOY: All abou' the Great Plague.

SECOND NEWSPAPER BOY: All abou' the end o' the world.

Up to the last two or three cries, JOHNSON has resisted them, but now he comes forward, putting a hand in his pocket for coppers, feeling very anxious.

JOHNSON: Here, what's all this?

FIRST NEWSPAPER BOY (*coolly*): All the winners.

SECOND NEWSPAPER BOY (*hopefully*): Duke stung by wasp.

JOHNSON (*annoyed*): Go on. Clear out.

They hurry out. JOHNSON returns to the desk and starts on the form again, but the music begins and a solitary clerk-dancer appears and performs his antics just in front of where JOHNSON is sitting. JOHNSON rises angrily.

JOHNSON (*shouting*): Oh—for God's sake—stop that. Get out—and stay out.

He takes a few menacing steps towards the clerk, who hurries out, through one of the office doors. The light changes, the desk no longer being brilliantly illuminated, and, in a more normal light,

MR. CLAYTON *strides in through one of the small proscenium doors. He is at least twenty-five years younger than he was when we saw him in the hall of JOHNSON'S house, and of course he is dressed like a prosperous City man of the pre-War period. He is extremely angry.*

CLAYTON (*shouting*): Johnson!

JOHNSON (*turning round, surprised*): Why—Mr. Clayton——!

CLAYTON (*angrily*): You young idiot, you were distinctly told to send out all those invoices dated the 30th.

JOHNSON (*now a dismayed junior clerk again*): No—I wasn't, sir.

CLAYTON: You were. I told you myself, a week ago. Every invoice to be dated the 30th. We shall have to send every customer an apology, and you can begin writing them now and stay until they're done. If you'd think a little more about your work and less about the Alhambra and the Oval, we wouldn't have these idiotic mistakes. And if this occurs again, Johnson, you'd better go and amuse yourself in some other office.

JOHNSON (*very apologetically*): Honestly, Mr. Clayton, it wasn't my fault.

CLAYTON (*as he bangs out*): Rubbish!

As JOHNSON stands near the door through which CLAYTON has just gone, and as he stares at it, puzzled and depressed, through the other small door MRS. GREGG enters quickly and quietly and sits down on the settee in front of the desk. She is now about forty-five, and dressed in the fashion of twenty-five years ago. She is doing some sewing.

MRS. GREGG (*quietly, but firmly*): You'd better come here, Robert, and talk to me.

JOHNSON (*turning, surprised*): Why, Mrs. Gregg! (*He goes nearer, nervously.*) Did—er—Jill—tell you?

MRS. GREGG: She did. And I do think it would have been much better if you had spoken to me first yourself, Robert. You must remember I am in a very difficult position, for I have to be both father and mother to poor Jill now.

JOHNSON (*sitting by her, awkwardly*): Well, I'm sorry, Mrs. Gregg. I didn't know quite what to do——

MRS. GREGG: Of course Jill thinks it's all very wonderful, but the poor child's very young and has had no experience.

JOHNSON (*eagerly, the young lover*): I'll make her happy, I know I will.

MRS. GREGG (*primly*): We've never been wealthy, of course, but before my husband's death we were reasonably well-off, and I think

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you ought to understand that Jill has been used to a great deal more than you can possibly offer her for a long time. I've no personal objection to you, Robert, though frankly I had hoped that Jill would do much better for herself. What can you offer her?

JOHNSON (*unhappily, for what can he offer her?*): Well—I know I'm no great catch——

MRS. GREGG (*closing her eyes, primly*): There's no need to be vulgar, Robert.

JOHNSON: Sorry. But—really—— I don't think my prospects are too bad.

MRS. GREGG (*putting her sewing together*): If you'll come to tea on Sunday, Jill's uncle, my brother, will be there—he's a solicitor and understands business—and then perhaps you wouldn't mind answering a few questions and telling him exactly what you think your prospects are. Four on Sunday, then, Robert.

And out she goes, leaving JOHNSON staring after her miserably, for apparently he knows this uncle, and we hear him muttering: "Lord!—he'll never understand—that hard old devil. Make me look like tuppence. Nice Sunday we're going to have. Prospects!" He sits down, still the young lover, perhaps to make a few notes on his prospects, then he sees the form in front of him, slowly recognises it, and the twenty-five years that have elapsed since he had that little talk with Mrs. Gregg vanish again in a flash.

VOICE FROM LOUD-SPEAKER: All applicants must now complete their forms by answering the question they are considering.

JOHNSON (*reading from his form*): If you had lent your brother ten pounds when you were twenty, and you now compelled him to return the loan with compound interest at fifteen per cent, what would he pay you? (*After a pause.*) That oughtn't to be hard. (*Pauses again.*) But why should I work it out? I wouldn't charge my brother compound interest or any other interest. Why ask such a question? And how did they know I had a brother? Perhaps they mean any brother. They say in church we're all brothers. That's awkward.

And now he hears—and we hear too—some music of a kind we have not heard here yet but will hear later when we come to the Inn.

JOHNSON *listens to it, then speaks slowly, as if an inner and deeper self is talking.*

JOHNSON: That music doesn't belong to this place. But then neither do I. Who does? I've lived in the world where that music was, but not for long—no, never for long. Not my fault. It comes and goes so quickly, just gleams and fades, that other world, like the light at sunset on distant hills. . . .

The music goes on, high and trailing, but now a girl's voice sings with it, high and trailing too. He listens a moment before speaking.

JOHNSON: But perhaps that is real—that, somewhere outside—and this only a dream. I've had dreams like this—with everything at first solid as rock—though they tell us now rocks aren't solid, only shifting shapes—but afterwards it all melted away, all the stone walls and iron bars. . . . (*This reminds him of something as he repeats it.*) . . . Stone walls—iron bars. . . .

He looks up to see approaching a pale wretched young man in convict's dress and behind him a stalwart policeman. The two of them move slowly down and halt in front of JOHNSON, who starts up and comes round as he recognises the convict.

JOHNSON: Why—Charlie—yes, it is!

CONVICT (*in dead tone*): Yes, Johnson, it's me all right.

JOHNSON (*amazed and distressed*): But—they said—you'd died there—in prison.

CONVICT: If you ask me, I died that afternoon in the dock, you remember. Yes, that's when I really died.

JOHNSON: Charlie, I'm sorry. You don't know how sorry I've been, how often I've thought about it all.

CONVICT (*with a miserable sneer*): Thought about it!

JOHNSON (*distressed*): But what could we do, Charlie, what could we do? They dragged the evidence out of us. We didn't want to make it hard for you, Charlie. And afterwards we tried to do what we could.

CONVICT: What could you do?

JOHNSON: There wasn't much, I know. They wouldn't let us send you anything, but some of us clubbed together to give the girl something.

CONVICT (*loudly and angrily*): Give the girl something! All she wanted was me, and where did you put me?

POLICEMAN (*roughly*): Go on, you, and not so much talk.

The CONVICT, without another look at JOHNSON, continues on his way across, while the POLICEMAN, after following him a few paces, suddenly stops and turns, to address JOHNSON.

POLICEMAN (*heavily*): And listen, mister, you be careful.

JOHNSON (*stammering*): What—what—do you mean?

POLICEMAN (*severely*): I mean, be careful, that's all. Don't think we haven't had our eye on you.

JOHNSON (*protesting, though at once feeling guilty*): But—I've never done anything.

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POLICEMAN (*aggressively*): Oh! Well, let's see. (*Produces notebook, and adopts manner of police witness.*) Did or did you not—on the first of the fifth—nineteen-hundred-and-six—take two shillings' worth of stamps out of the stamp book at your office?

JOHNSON (*staggered*): Well—yes, I did.

POLICEMAN (*significantly*): Ah!

JOHNSON (*hurriedly protesting*): But I was only a youngster—gave way to sudden temptation—I was hard up and wanted to buy something in a hurry—and I put two shillings in stamps back the next day—I—

POLICEMAN (*same manner as before*): Did you or did you not—on several occasions—make tax returns you knew at the time were false—?

JOHNSON (*trying to cut in*): I only—

POLICEMAN (*checking him*): Did you or did you not—in connection with a large order from Singapore, when a higher price was quoted by mistake—and you was on the point of cabling your customer the proper price—accept this large order at the higher price and cancel the cable?

JOHNSON: Well, I was doing it for the firm.

POLICEMAN: Did you or did you not—on the third of the eleventh, nineteen-thirty-one—deliberately hide one of the firm's books—to keep it from the accountants for a day or two—

JOHNSON (*desperately*): We were in a temporary difficulty—and I—

POLICEMAN (*interrupting, severely*): Tell me you've never done anything! Get yourself into *serious* trouble one of these days. Don't think we haven't got our eye on you. Be careful, that's all. Just be careful.

He gives poor JOHNSON a final severe look, then goes out. JOHNSON sinks down on to the settee in front of the desk, and looks down at the form he is still holding.

JOHNSON (*reading*): Just before the outbreak of war, you have bought up all the available stocks of iodine. You can either let the wholesalers have some at an increased price, or go to the department of medical supplies and name your own price. Which would be wiser? (*He looks at it horrified.*) Wiser?

The lights change, and the clerks and secretaries flicker about, while JOHNSON remains motionless, silent and depressed. When they have gone, and the bright lights are back again, we see that the TWO EXAMINERS are standing one at each side of him.

ACT I JOHNSON OVER JORDAN

FIRST EXAMINER (*announcing himself*): First Examiner.

SECOND EXAMINER (*announcing himself*): Second Examiner.

FIRST EXAMINER: Your form, please.

SECOND EXAMINER (*looking at it*): Miserable!

FIRST EXAMINER: Contemptible!

SECOND EXAMINER: He's hardly tried.

FIRST EXAMINER (*screwing up the form*): We couldn't possibly accept this.

SECOND EXAMINER: No money for you this time.

Both EXAMINERS move away, then turn.

FIRST EXAMINER: You'll have to try again to-morrow. Keep on trying.

SECOND EXAMINER: Try, try, and try again.

JOHNSON (*sullenly*): I'm not going to try again, and I'm not coming here to-morrow.

FIRST EXAMINER (*cackling*): No, you're not *coming* here to-morrow because you'll still *be* here to-morrow.

JOHNSON (*defiantly*): I won't.

SECOND EXAMINER (*cackling*): But you forget that without money you can't get out of here. . . .

FIRST EXAMINER: You needn't pay any money to get out, but you must have money.

SECOND EXAMINER: And you haven't any. You wouldn't be here if you had.

JOHNSON is slumped in despair on the settee. The Two EXAMINERS move together nearer the door, then turn again, and now in their tones are horrible echoes of the schoolmaster and Clayton and Mrs. Gregg.

FIRST EXAMINER: Try again to-morrow, Johnson. Keep on trying.

SECOND EXAMINER: Remember, Johnson, attention to work is the secret of progress.

FIRST EXAMINER: Think more about your work, Johnson.

SECOND EXAMINER: Ask yourself exactly what your prospects are.

FIRST EXAMINER (*in a nasty little squeak, to the music*): Good day.

SECOND EXAMINER (*in the same manner*): Good day.

Out they go together, and now the brilliant lights begin to fade. JOHNSON is still slumped on the settee. The very brisk strident music heard before is now a sort of broken dragging march in a minor key. The lights go down further.

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VOICE FROM LOUD-SPEAKER: Everything for the incinerators. Everything for the incinerators.

The clerks come on, carrying baskets filled with paper, spilling some of the paper as they move slowly towards the back, where a curtain lifts showing a gleaming red opening. A tall figure is standing there, with his back to us, dressed in workman's clothes, and his job appears to be to feed the furnace with the baskets of paper. We can see him easily above the great desk because he is standing on a little platform, at one side of which there is a flight of steps leading we do not know where. As the clerks go off, rather like pieces of clock-work running down, JOHNSON rises, as the music ends, and picks up one or two of the nearest bits of paper.

JOHNSON (*excitedly*): Why—this is money. What are you going to do with it?

VOICE FROM LOUD-SPEAKER (*coolly*): Burn it. Everything has to go to the incinerators at the end of the day.

JOHNSON: Yes—but—money too?

VOICE FROM LOUD-SPEAKER: Yes, money too. All the same.

JOHNSON (*with mounting excitement*): But—I want some money.

He is looking up towards the loud-speakers, but as no reply comes from them, now he goes nearer the FIGURE, who still has his back turned to us, feeding the furnace. JOHNSON now addresses the FIGURE.

JOHNSON: I say—look here—silly to burn all that money, when I want some.

THE FIGURE (*not turning*): How much?

JOHNSON (*very excited now*): How much? Well, much as I can get, I suppose. And it looks to me as if these are banknotes—and big ones, some of 'em.

THE FIGURE: Yes.

JOHNSON: Well, now—couldn't I have a few? Say, a handful? A pocketful? Two pockets full? *All* my pockets full? Could I?

THE FIGURE (*in deep mocking tone*): Come and get it.

As he says this, the FIGURE turns round, holding out money, but revealing himself, to the sound of harsh menacing brassy chords from the orchestra, wearing a terrifying death's head. He stands in a queer deathly light, on the steps, a foot or two above JOHNSON, who has now mounted the platform. We can see nothing now but these two, and the red gleam of the furnace.

THE FIGURE (*as JOHNSON does not move, mockingly*): Well, come and get it. Frightened?

JOHNSON (*as he shrinks back*): Yes.

THE FIGURE: Why?

JOHNSON (*slowly, unhappily*): I always have been. It's been behind everything, waiting—that fear. The dark grave, corruption, and the worm. I remember, when I was a child, seeing the half-rotten carcase of a cat, white and crawling with maggots. Then once, the swollen purple face of a drowned man. Then later, my mother, smiling but turned into wax; a sickly sweet smell all over the house; the heavy tread of the coffin bearers; the thudding of the clay on the coffin lid. I went to the War and I remember the vacant eye-sockets of my dead friends. There was a hand I have tried to forget. It was sticking out of a parapet, a mute and rigid cry for help, as if the rest of him had been turned into earth and sandbags, and he knew—he still knew—and held out a hand towards the warm living flesh, before the worms were at us too—oh God!—

THE FIGURE (*calmly*): The worms are God's, too. Why shouldn't they have their chance?

JOHNSON (*bitterly*): Theirs is a better chance. They do not know what is waiting for them—we do.

THE FIGURE: You have been afraid so long, there cannot be anything left to fear. Come. (*He holds out the money.*)

JOHNSON (*shuddering*): No.

THE FIGURE (*sharply*): Come and look closer, you fool. Come.

Now, very slowly, as if drawn against his will, JOHNSON moves closer, and then within a pace or two, stops and stares.

JOHNSON: Why—it's a mask, a painted mask.

He goes a little nearer to make sure, while the FIGURE stands upright, still waiting, a whole sack of money in front of him.

THE FIGURE: Take it off.

JOHNSON (*fearfully*): No. There might be worse behind it. Death's real face—not even the clean bone—a crawling corruption—

THE FIGURE: You will be here for ever if you don't.

JOHNSON hesitates, then, making up his mind, he suddenly steps forward, as the music makes a queer high tremolo, and plucks off the mask, revealing behind it the face of a calm, wise-looking person, at whom JOHNSON stares in bewilderment.

THE FIGURE (*apparently amused*): Well?

JOHNSON (*slowly*): You are like—and yet not quite like—so many people I have known. It's as if they all looked at me together. My father . . . our old family doctor, MacFarlane . . . and my first schoolmaster . . . even our old nurse . . . and a parson I once

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talked to, just one night, crossing to France . . . and . . . and . . .

He cannot at the moment think of any more, but he knows and we know there are probably hundreds more.

THE FIGURE (*calmly*): Do you still want your money?

JOHNSON (*eagerly and with an unpleasant swagger*): Yes, of course I do. Lucky I had the guts to take off that foul mask, wasn't it? But I'm not bad when it comes to a real push. Put me really up against it, and I don't disgrace myself. Yes, let's have some money, and get out of this. (*As he fills his pockets with notes.*) Fivers, tenners, and I saw a hundred-pound note. This is something to be going on with, eh? I can do something with this packet. And nobody can say I haven't earned it, can they?

While he is stuffing the last of the notes into his pockets, what seemed before the small opening down to a furnace is now revealed as a decorated and brightly-illuminated corridor, and along this corridor comes the sound of a dance band.

JOHNSON: Listen! What's that music? Sounds good to me.

THE FIGURE: Oh—that! It's the night club—the *Jungle Hot Spot*. Bright lights. Hot Jazz. Dinners, suppers, drinks, beautiful girls.

JOHNSON: They'll take this money there, eh?

THE FIGURE: They'll be delighted to take it.

JOHNSON: That's the place for me then. Let's have some fun while we're alive, I say; we're a long time dead. What do you say?

THE FIGURE (*rather sadly*): I say what I've always said, Robert, that there isn't much harm in you, but nevertheless you're rather a fool.

JOHNSON (*angrily*): Oh yes, that's just what you *would* say. Just when I look like having some fun for once, you'd like to butt in and spoil everything. Well, you're not going to this time. I'm going to see what's going on in this hot spot of yours.

The entrance to the night club is now brighter than ever and the dance music is growing louder. JOHNSON is now shouting with excitement.

JOHNSON: That's the stuff, boys. Come on, snap into it. Keep it going, and make it hot. We'll have a big night. I'm coming.

He waves a hand and down he goes, out of sight, and the dance music is louder than ever and the curtain is falling.

ACT II

We are looking again at the hall of JOHNSON'S house, but now it is the afternoon of the day following the funeral, and the place does not look quite so dreary as it did before. AGNES is arranging some flowers on the small table, and now FREDa, wearing an overall and still looking rather peaked, comes out of the drawing-room, carrying some wilted large lilies.

FREDA: Agnes, take these and throw them out.

AGNES (*as she takes the lilies*): Yes, miss. Though they're not done yet, not by a long way. If you was to cut their stalks——

FREDA: No, I hate them. Big sickly lilies. I think it was the sight of them yesterday that started me off.

AGNES: I thought you got through it very well, Miss Freda.

FREDA: No, I didn't, Agnes. I was stupid.

RICHARD, wearing an overcoat, comes in, and stops at the hall-stand to leave his hat and overcoat there. AGNES goes out with the lilies. FREDa, who has taken over the job of arranging the flowers, stops and turns when she hears her brother coming in. We can have a good look at them now, and see that they make a pleasant pair of youngsters.

FREDA: Oh—Richard—what was it like?

RICHARD: A bit mouldy. Then old Clayton came in, and told me to pop off. He's coming here to-morrow—he and Uncle George, to settle things. How's Mother?

FREDA (*not very happily*): Just the same. Very, very quiet—and sort of strange——

RICHARD (*uneasily*): It would be better—wouldn't it—if she was making a fuss—you know, crying——?

FREDA: Much. This other thing's a bit—frightening.

RICHARD: I know. Where is she?

FREDA: Upstairs. She said she'd lie down. (*She pauses.*) Do you think—he knows?

RICHARD: Who?

FREDA: Daddy, of course.

RICHARD: Knows what?

THE PLAYS OF J. B. PRIESTLEY

FREDA (*very earnestly*): Knows that all this has been going on—all that awful fuss yesterday and then this strange quietness to-day?

RICHARD: No, of course not. When you're dead, you're dead.

FREDA: Yes, but you might know what was going on?

RICHARD: Don't be a chump. How *could* you?

FREDA: I don't know, but I feel somehow you might.

RICHARD: Why, he didn't know anything that last two days. Just muttered a bit, that's all. In a sort of dream, really.

FREDA (*who has been thinking about this*): Well, supposing the dreaming goes on. Then you wouldn't even know you'd died, would you? And then it wouldn't be so bad for him as it is for us—would it? I mean, because he could be dreaming about still being with us, and wouldn't really know the difference.

RICHARD (*thoughtfully*): He would. You always do in dreams. There's something queer about them. You always know. (*Pauses.*) All to-day I've been thinking about him. Couldn't stop, somehow. Y'know, Freda, I was a bit rotten to him sometimes. Didn't mean to be. It was all right when I was a kid—we had some grand times—but just lately he began to think I was getting too cheeky and I thought he interfered too much, as if I was still a kid—you know how it was.

FREDA: Yes.

RICHARD (*slowly*): I thought I'd tell him it was all right and I was sorry and all that, but it was too late then—he couldn't understand what anybody was saying to him.

FREDA: Perhaps if you thought it, he got it somehow. (*Pauses.*) You know, I used to think of him as being quite old.

RICHARD: Lord yes! So did I. Terribly old.

FREDA: I know. Well, just lately I've suddenly seen he isn't really old—I mean—— (*She is distressed.*)—he wasn't.

Her mother, JILL, now comes in slowly, a pale-faced figure in black, looking almost as if she were walking in her sleep.

FREDA (*turning, reproachfully*): Oh—mother—you said you were going to rest.

JILL (*apologetically*): I know, darling.

FREDA: Agnes and I can do everything. There isn't much more to do.

RICHARD: And I'll help. Come on, mother, let me take you back to your room. Then try and sleep.

JILL (*with suppressed agitation*): No, darling. I did try. I was—half asleep. Then I had a hateful sort of dream. Frightening, horrible. I

suppose it was really a nightmare. I dreamt I was trying to find your father. I knew I had to find him. And I had to look in the strangest places—all vague—but—frightening——

By the time she has said the last word the light, which has been fading rapidly, has almost gone, and the next moment we are in darkness. . . .

. . . At first we do not see all the night club but only the bar, a small cocktail bar, gaudily decorated, glittering, and lit with strange crimson and purple lights. JOHNSON, now in full evening dress, is perched on a stool, swallowing cocktails and talking to the barman, a smooth, white-coated, rather sinister fellow. JOHNSON is already beginning to feel the effect of the cocktails.

JOHNSON: What do you call this? (*Holds up brightly-coloured cocktail.*)

BARMAN: Hell Diver, sir.

JOHNSON: Hell Diver, eh?

BARMAN: One of my specialities.

JOHNSON (*after gulping it down*): I like it better than the blue one. What do you call the blue one?

BARMAN: Mermaid's Kiss.

JOHNSON: Pretty good. But this Hell Diver is better. Touches the spot, eh? Let me have another. (*As BARMAN begins mixing another.*) Now, where have those nice fellows gone? I hope they didn't pay you for those drinks.

BARMAN (*smoothly*): No, sir, they said you were paying.

JOHNSON (*with careless grandeur*): Quite right, quite right. What's the name of that smart, clever-looking one, who said he could put me on to something?

BARMAN: Probably Mr. Scorpion, sir. One of our regular customers here, sir. Here every night, nearly.

JOHNSON (*drinking*): Quite right. I shall come here every night. And what was the little gentleman's name—that legal man in the City?

BARMAN: Mr. Rat, sir. Comes here a lot with Mr. Slug. You were talking to Mr. Slug.

JOHNSON (*with fussy importance*): Yes, yes. Had very interesting talk with Mr. Slug. Nice crowd. (*As BARMAN hands him a bright yellow drink.*) What's this one?

BARMAN: Dragon's Breath.

JOHNSON: Always wanted to try a Dragon's Breath. (*Gulps it, gasps, then tosses BARMAN a note.*) Keep the change.

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BARMAN: There isn't any change, sir. With all the drinks together your bill comes to——

JOHNSON (*cutting in*): All right. Don't want any arithmetic to-night. (*Tosses him another note.*) Keep the change out of *that*.

BARMAN (*not impressed*): Thanks.

JOHNSON (*more to himself than to the BARMAN*): Man needs a little recreation. Relax. Can't be solemn and responsible all the time. Not good enough. Bad for a fellow, too, not to hit the bright lights and hot spots once in a while. Scorpion and Slug were quite right. Good enough for them, good enough for me.

Now JOHNSON leaves the bar and comes towards us, and we no longer see the bar but only JOHNSON'S face, strained with excitement in the sharp white light.

JOHNSON (*with mounting excitement*): There is a beast with shaggy hide and claws, and now he has roused himself from his long sleep, and I feel his fiery breath. Now I begin to see with his eyes and hear with his ears, and the lights burn terribly and the sounds pulsate through my blood.

He turns, and immediately the floor of the night club comes into view and we hear the music of a rumba and see a number of well-dressed but rather unpleasant-looking people dancing. There are little tables and chairs round the dance floor, and at the back, under a large decoration made of glittering writhing tinsel leaves, is a small platform. The scene is lit with acid greens and violent purples. JOHNSON regards it with enthusiasm.

JOHNSON: Just the sort of place I wanted. Couldn't be better. Make a big night of it.

The dance has ended and now the bar is lit up again, and there enter from below SIR JAMES PORKER, a fat grunting elderly man, and two girls, who look exactly alike, chiefly because they are wearing masks like dolls' faces. JOHNSON stares at them curiously.

BARMAN: Good evening, Sir James.

PORKER (*grunting*): Evening. Gimme three of the usual.

BARMAN: Three of the usual.

As PORKER and his two girls settle at the bar, the HEADWAITER, a plump smooth foreign fellow, with a queer face, comes down and bows.

HEADWAITER (*bowing*): Good evening, Sir James. A great pleasure, Sir James. Good evening, ladies.

PORKER: 'Evening, Toad. Got my table?

HEADWAITER: Certainly, Sir James. Any time you are ready. You would like to see the menu, Sir James?

PORKER (*who never experiments*): No. Gimme all the usual.

HEADWAITER (*bowing*): Certainly, Sir James—all the usual.

PORKER *and the GIRLS now have their drinks. The HEADWAITER notices the existence of JOHNSON, who has been hovering not far away, waiting to be noticed.*

HEADWAITER: Good evening, sir. You will be wanting a table?

JOHNSON (*vaguely, but grandly*): Oh—yes. Table—certainly.

HEADWAITER: For how many please, sir?

JOHNSON: Oh—I dunno. Pick somebody up, I expect.

HEADWAITER: Of course, sir. Lots of charrr-ning ladies will be here soon.

He tries to lead JOHNSON away, to a table, but JOHNSON resists this and brings him further down.

JOHNSON (*whispering*): Does it matter not being in evening dress?

HEADWAITER (*surprised*): But, sir, you are quite all right.

He indicates JOHNSON'S clothes. JOHNSON looks down and is obviously surprised by what he sees and clearly did not know he was in evening clothes.

JOHNSON (*slowly, puzzled*): That's queer. I wasn't wearing these.

HEADWAITER: You must have changed in a great hurry, sir. Now I will give you a good table.

JOHNSON (*importantly*): One of your very best.

HEADWAITER: Certainly, sir, one of our very best.

JOHNSON (*vulgarily*): What I always say is—the best is good enough for me.

HEADWAITER (*a diplomat*): Oh—very well put, sir. I must remember that. Now, sir—— (*Leading him towards a table.*) —Some supper—a little wine, eh?—dancing—and a nice girl, eh, sir?

JOHNSON (*as he sits down*): That's the idea. Enjoy yourself while you can, I say.

HEADWAITER: Quite right, sir.

JOHNSON (*pleased with himself*): Eat, drink and be merry, eh?

HEADWAITER: Excellent, sir. And very well put, if I may say so.

JOHNSON: Let's live while we can, I say, because we're a long time dead.

HEADWAITER (*with faintly sinister inflection*): Exactly, sir. A long time dead. I must remember that too, sir.

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JOHNSON (*going from bad to worse*): I have the money— (*And he shows a roll of notes.*) —And I've earned it—so I'll do what I like with it. And I can spend it—you'll see that. Give me a good time—and I'll see you're all right.

HEADWAITER: We will give you a very good time, sir.

Now he bends forward and indicates PORKER, who is sitting with his GIRLS at a table opposite, loaded with food.

HEADWAITER (*whispering*): You know that gentleman? Very rich, one of our best patrons, always here. Sir James Porker.

JOHNSON (*looking across*): He looks the right sort.

PORKER, *seeing that JOHNSON is looking across at him with interest, now waves a hand and beckons JOHNSON to him. Flattered by this notice, JOHNSON goes across.*

PORKER (*talking with his mouth full*): 'Evening. Seem to know your face.

JOHNSON (*pleased*): My name's Johnson. And you're Sir James Porker, I think.

PORKER: Right. Come here a lot. Know the girls? This is Dot. This is Maisie.

JOHNSON (*smiling idiotically*): How d'you do?

PORKER: In the City?

JOHNSON: Yes.

PORKER: Might put you on to a good thing one of these days. Still plenty of good things if you know where to find 'em and get in on the ground floor.

JOHNSON (*impressed*): Thanks very much.

PORKER (*as dancing begins again*): Like to dance, Johnson?

JOHNSON: Yes. But I need a partner.

PORKER: Dot here'll dance with you.

JOHNSON bows to DOT and begins dancing with her. He dances with enthusiasm but not with much skill, occasionally bumping into other couples. We hear what he is saying to his partner.

JOHNSON: This is fine. . . . Hope you're enjoying it? . . . Long time since I danced with such a pretty girl. . . . Like dancing too, but a bit out of practice—busy man, y'know. . . . A man's as old as he feels, I always say. What do you think? . . . Like your hair—wonderful hair you've got. Expect a lot of fellows have told you that, but after all the opinion of a man of the world's worth having, eh?

When the dancing ends, he takes her back to PORKER's table and stands there a minute or two.

PORKER (*patronisingly*): Enjoy your dance, Johnson?

JOHNSON: Oh yes—delightful!

PORKER: Dot's a good dancer. Sometimes take her round myself. Maisie here talks better.'

JOHNSON (*glancing at her*): Oh—really!

PORKER: Yes. Says some pretty smart things sometimes. Makes her laugh. But Dot knows the best stories—very juicy.

JOHNSON (*coarsely*): Oh—I like 'em juicy.

PORKER (*very suggestively*): And that isn't all they can do, not by a long chalk. Is it, girls? I'll say it isn't. Eh, Johnson?

He guffaws and JOHNSON guffaws with him, and then JOHNSON turns away and sees a stout middle-aged woman standing in the bar, which is now lit up again, beckoning to him. This woman is very elaborately dressed, but has a coarse leering quality. JOHNSON joins her in the bar. The rest of the night club is now in darkness.

STOUT WOMAN (*with a leer*): You don't remember me, do you?

JOHNSON (*who doesn't*): Er—let me see—now——

STOUT WOMAN: Weren't you once little Bobby Johnson, Grantham Street, Longfield?

JOHNSON (*surprised*): Why—yes——

STOUT WOMAN (*chuckling*): Knew it! And you don't remember me? When I was a kid. Lived next door but one. Lottie Spragg.

JOHNSON (*staring at her in wonder*): Of course! Lottie Spragg. Yes, of course.

STOUT WOMAN (*in obscene whisper*): Remember how all you boys used to take me behind the old mill?

JOHNSON: Oh—I don't think I did——

STOUT WOMAN (*in the same tone*): Go on, you was as bad as the rest of 'em. Naughty little devils! Do you remember——

As she leans forward to whisper, the lights go down in the bar, though JOHNSON and the woman can still be seen there, and now a single white ray picks out JILL who has just entered below, on the other side. She looks exactly as we saw her when she came into the hall to tell the children about her dream. The music is playing softly.

JILL (*urgently*): I'm looking for my husband, Robert Johnson.

Two dancers turn in the light that follows her, and she sees—and we see—that they are wearing horrible masks, which turn them into dreadful caricatures of the types who might be found in such a place. She shrinks away, then moves on.

THE PLAYS OF J. B. PRIESTLEY

JILL (*more urgently*): I'm looking for my husband, Robert Johnson.

As she goes forward, she sees more masked dancers, and then she stops near a group, consisting of the HEADWAITER and two or three ordinary waiters, and as she speaks again, they all turn together, and we see that they look more like animals than human beings.

JILL (*calling*): Robert! Robert! Robert!

We catch a last glimpse of her surrounded by horrible masked figures, gibbering and tittering. Now JOHNSON stops the STOUT WOMAN a moment and looks up, as if hearing something.

JOHNSON (*calling, in hard voice*): He's not here. Go away. Go away.

The light that was on JILL has now faded out, but in the darkness we still hear a faint and dying "Robert! Robert!" Then the bar is bright again and JOHNSON and the STOUT WOMAN are laughing together.

STOUT WOMAN (*chuckling and nudging him*): Saucy devil! You're just as bad as ever. So am I.

JOHNSON: Ah—but we know a bit more now.

STOUT WOMAN (*still chuckling*): Well, we started as we meant to go on, didn't we? (*Moving.*) I must get back to the boys. Don't do anything I wouldn't do. Happy days!

JOHNSON (*as he takes her down*): Happy nights, you mean. So long!

When she has gone and he turns to the bar again, he finds installed there on a stool the young man CHARLIE, whom we saw in the office as a convict. But now apparently CHARLIE did not get found out, for he is very spruce indeed in full evening dress and with a carnation as a buttonhole, and he is obviously very much at home in this bar.

CHARLIE: Well, if it's not old stick-in-the-mud Johnson!

JOHNSON: Charlie? Yes, it is.

CHARLIE (*to BARMAN*): Two of my specials, George. These'll put hair on your chest, Johnson. Well, how's tricks?

JOHNSON (*sitting*): Fine, fine, absolutely fine. You're looking very prosperous, Charlie.

CHARLIE (*in the close, confidential bar-style of such men*): You bet I am. I had a nice little start with that fifteen hundred I pinched right from under old Clayton's nose. Neatest thing you ever saw. (*Chuckling.*)

JOHNSON (*chuckling*): Serve him right.

CHARLIE: Had a month in Monte with a bit I was running round with, then came home and ditched her—and went in with Finkelstein

on some very pretty deals. If you're smart, I might let you into something—but—you've got to be smart, y'know.

JOHNSON (*boastfully*): Leave it to me, Charlie ol' boy. Why—only to-day—or yesterday—some time lately—I was somewhere—in an office—sort of office, anyhow—and things looked difficult—fact is, they were being made to look difficult—deliberately being made to look difficult—but I wouldn't stand for it. Oh, no, no. Cut it out, I said, cut it right out. I want my money and I don't leave here till I get it. Sort of man I am now.

CHARLIE: I can see you're getting smart. By the way, seem to be out of change—d'you mind lending me a fiver?

JOHNSON (*grandly*): Certainly not. (*Hands him notes.*) Better make it a tenner.

CHARLIE (*rising*): Thanks, old boy. Anything I can do for you here?

JOHNSON (*whispering*): Yes. Get me a girl—a nice fresh little piece.

CHARLIE: That's easily fixed. A friend of mine, cleverest woman I know, will attend to that—Madame Vulture. (*Grins and nods, then goes.*)

JOHNSON *turns round, and there, standing just behind him, is this MADAME VULTURE, a tall thin creature in a black feathered evening dress, with the mask face of a vulture, and with hands that have immensely long sharp blood-red nails, like talons. A horrible figure.*

JOHNSON *stares at her, startled and fascinated.*

MADAME VULTURE (*with a ghastly playfulness*): Now I know what you gentlemen are. You won't have this, and you will have that. No use my trying to suit you unless I know what it is you fancy. Big, medium, little? Brunette, red-head, blonde? Experienced or very young? White, I suppose?

JOHNSON: Certainly. Must be white.

MADAME VULTURE (*a good saleswoman*): I think you're wise, though, of course, some gentlemen have exotic tastes. White, then. And blonde perhaps? Why not try a nice blonde?

JOHNSON: A nice li'l' blonde would just suit me.

MADAME VULTURE: Or—of course—a pretty little brunette?

JOHNSON: Certainly. Just right.

MADAME VULTURE: Not too big, not too old, not too experienced, eh?

JOHNSON (*coarsely*): You've got the idea.

MADAME VULTURE: Well, now, I have the very thing for you. Absolutely delightful, and quite fresh. Only just come into my hands. (*These hands are very close to his face.*)

THE PLAYS OF J. B. PRIESTLEY

JOHNSON (*staring at them*): I don't like your hands.

MADAME VULTURE (*with sinister playfulness*): Now, now, Mr. Johnson, don't be naughty.

JOHNSON (*with drunken idiocy*): I'm very naughty—fella.

MADAME VULTURE: I can sec you are. Now then, what do you say to this nice fresh little girl?

JOHNSON: Let's have a look at her.

MADAME VULTURE: You understand, my clients are all gentlemen of means—— I don't believe in a cheap trade—so——

JOHNSON (*giving her some notes*): Oh—you won't find me mean—so long as you deliver the goods all right.

MADAME VULTURE: The goods, you will see, Mr. Johnson, will be absolutely charming, just what you want.

She goes. JOHNSON takes another drink, giggles a little, and the dancing begins again. Then suddenly the music stops, everybody is still, and all the lights fade out except a single white light on JOHNSON. It is as if time were held up, and JOHNSON now spoke from a deeper self.

JOHNSON (*in slow, deep tone*): Here I sit waiting—a fool. I know I am a fool, yet I know too I am no fool. All this has always been folly before, but now perhaps, just for once, the miracle may happen. . . . They say I am half-animal, half-god. . . . Yet I do not think it is entirely the animal in me that is waiting here, for the animal must be a simple creature, with a few sharp needs, easily satisfied. . . . But this is not simple, this lighted and scented jungle, where everything has been so carefully devised to taste bitter-sweet, half-rotten. . . . Even if the animal in me is fed and tickled, it is to arouse the god, grumbling in his sleep. . . . I make a beast of myself, but the beast is no simple animal, though it may have a shaggy hide and claws. . . . It has the god's head, like the Sphinx, which perhaps looks calm because once, ages ago, in a night as big as our centuries, it slaked all its passion. . . . And even here and now, as I sit slaving, sweating and lustful as a cow-led bull, I know that I wish for peace. . . . Let a miracle be worked for me-the-beast, so that the beast shall be satisfied and I shall have peace . . . without regret . . . without regret . . .

The lights come up again. The dancing continues. He is his giggling drunken self again. The HEADWAITER now comes to him. But now the HEADWAITER wears a mask, half-human, half like a toad. And all the guests and waiters are now seen to be grotesquely masked.

HEADWAITER: Everything all right, sir?

JOHNSON (*drunkenly, staring*): Who are you?

HEADWAITER: Maitre d'hotel, sir.

JOHNSON (*solemnly*): But you've got a face like a Toad.

HEADWAITER: That's right, sir. Toad is the name.

JOHNSON (*vaguely, but grandly*): Well—treat me all right—and I'll be all right with you. When I've had few more drinks and got nice li'l' girl, life'll be fine, fine. I can feel it bubbling up—fine, fine stuff. Sitting on top o' the world, I am. An' that's where you've got to sit, right on top of it.

The floor has now been cleared, as if for a floor show, and in a hard bright light and to fast loud music four tap-dancers, two young men in evening clothes and top hats, and two girls, almost naked but wearing coloured top hats, do a fast tap routine. When they have done, there is some applause from the masked guests sitting round, and JOHNSON joins in with enthusiasm. There is a roll on the drum, and there appears on the little platform at the back, where there is a microphone, the compère of the floor show, who is in evening dress, but also wears the mortar-board and the M.A. gown of the unpleasant schoolmaster whom we saw in the office. The truth is that he is both the compère of the floor show and that unpleasant schoolmaster, one of those telescoped personalities we often meet in dreams.

COMPÈRE-SCHOOLMASTER (*at microphone*): And now, friends, before commencing our floor show, in which I can promise you a big surprise, I want you to give a hand to the boy who's been stealing the front pages and winning all hearts lately—the new champ—Jim Gorilla!

A powerful fellow in evening dress, wearing a huge grinning monkey-mask, comes forward, holding his hands together above his head in the manner of a boxer saluting his audience. He is loudly applauded, JOHNSON being prominent among the applauders. GORILLA shakes hands with JOHNSON, who is still sitting at his table. Then one of PORKER's girls—it might be DOT or it might be MAISIE; who knows?—rushes forward to embrace GORILLA, who carries her off to his table.

COMPÈRE-SCHOOLMASTER (*at microphone*): And now, friends, a new novelty act, the first time here, and I know it will be a socko number. Robert Johnson—who will make an exhibition of himself. Give him a hand, friends.

JOHNSON (*staggering up, surprised*): Wha'—me?

COMPÈRE-SCHOOLMASTER (*at microphone, pointing*): R(

JOHNSON is now in the centre of the floor, with the ugrus on num, and the other guests all sitting round waiting. We hear the soft jiggling music suitable for a clown routine.

THE PLAYS OF J. B. PRIESTLEY

JOHNSON (*drunkenly*): I dunno wha's the idea—but you're all very nice people—I'm a nice fella too—and so le's all be jolly—wha' about a drink?

They laugh at him. And now a waiter wearing a clown's mask brings on a small table, chair, and large trick bottle of champagne. He puts down the table, offers the chair to JOHNSON, then pulls it away so that JOHNSON falls heavily, protesting amidst laughter. When JOHNSON is finally seated, there is comic business with the trick champagne. WAITER pretends to rub it in JOHNSON's hair, and so forth. Finally, when WAITER goes, JOHNSON is sitting on the floor, very silly, singing and giggling, while the other guests laugh at him. There should be more and more cruelty in their laughter.

JOHNSON (*in maudlin style*): Y'know, funny thing about me is—they think I'm nice respec'able man—they do, honestly. Responsible position in old firm. Wife, son, daughter. All very, very respec'able. 'Morning, Mr. Shonson. 'Morning, Mr. Shonson. 'Evening, Shonson. How are you to-day? Anything further, Mr. Shonson? All like that, see? Jus' rubbish. All the time jus' a clown, tha's me—a clown. A nice clown, mark you—oh, yes—a nice, nice clown— (*Giggles.*)

The other guests throws rolls of bread at him, one idiotic youth coming very close and throwing his roll very savagely. JOHNSON does not like this, and scrambles to his feet, rather suspicious but filled with self-pity.

JOHNSON. Steady—steady—don' be too rough with poor ol' Shonson—poor ol' boy! Where's nice li'l' girl they promised me, eh?

GORILLA (*at back*): Oh, she'll be along.

JOHNSON (*singing drunkenly*): We're going to have good ti-ime. We're all going to have good ti-ime.

CHARLIE (*from back, calling loudly*): Got any money, Johnson old boy?

JOHNSON (*with drunken dignity*): Certainly, certainly got money. Want shome? (*Flings up handful of notes.*) Take it, take it, take it. Nothing to me. I'm Robert Johnson. Take it all.

He flings up several handfuls of notes and now there is a scrimmage round him of the male guests, all fighting to pick up the notes. JOHNSON, muttering about the little girl they promised him, pushes his way out, and as soon as he does all the lights on this dance floor rapidly fade. Meanwhile, curtains have been drawn to reveal a little private room, almost entirely filled by a divan. It should be flooded with coloured light—light purple or deep pink. We see JOHNSON sitting on this divan, and now CHARLIE comes into this little room, wearing a wolf's mask.

CHARLIE: Now then, old boy, see you've found the right place.

JOHNSON (*surprised and suspicious*): You—Charlie?

CHARLIE: Sure—your old pall

JOHNSON: You're looking dam' queer now, Charlie. Where's the li'l' girl you promised me?

CHARLIE: Here she is.

He steps back and MADAME VULTURE comes in, bringing with her a young girl in a simple (preferably white) evening dress and wearing a domino mask of the same material.

MADAME VULTURE: Here she is, just what you wanted. (*To the GIRL, as she shrinks.*) Don't be a fool. Have a good time.

She laughs and CHARLIE laughs in a wolf-like manner and they go. JOHNSON tries to pull the GIRL nearer to him, but she shrinks away. This goes on throughout his dialogue that follows. The GIRL always resists but with the minimum of effort, shrinking and slightly pulling herself away from him rather than actively resisting him. Beginning the whole scene in a sullen, suspicious, bestial mood, he rapidly gets worse as it develops.

JOHNSON: And a very nice li'l' piece too. *Very nice.* Don't be silly. Nobody's going to hurt you. Jus' going to have a good time. (*As she resists again, angrily.*) Wha's the idea, eh? Who d'you think you are, anyhow? Lemme tell you, you're jus' a li'l' bit, tha's all, jus' a tup-penny-hapenny li'l' bit o' fluff. Bought an' paid for too, don' forget that. An' don' think I'm not good enough for you, because lemme tell you I am. Man of the world, I am. Worth a dozen o' the sort o' young sprigs you like. Come here. I'm here to have a good time and I've paid for it and I'll see I get it. And if you won't be a sport and join in, I'll damn well make you, see? Let's have a look at you. First thing, we'll have that silly mask off. Come on, take it off.

She shakes her head, succeeds in turning away again and evading his efforts to remove the mask himself, but now we can hear her crying. This makes him angrier.

JOHNSON: Oh—for God's sake—don't start crying. What good are you, anyway? Come on, come on, you miserable little sniffer—if you think I'm going to be soft with you, let you get away with that stuff, you're all wrong. I know all the tricks, don't forget. Come on.

Now he has seized her very roughly, but at this moment a YOUTH, wearing an ordinary lounge suit, but masked like the girl, dashes into the scene.

YOUTH: Leave her alone.

JOHNSON (*very angrily*): Now don't you start interfering, whoever you are, because I won't stand for it. Clear out.

THE PLAYS OF J. B. PRIESTLEY

He leaves the GIRL to threaten the YOUTH, which gives the GIRL a chance to slip past him, and the YOUTH hurries out of this little room on to the dance floor, which is now half-lit and is seen to be deserted.

JOHNSON (*mad with rage, coming out of little room*): Oh—no—you don't. You two aren't going to make a monkey out of me. Damn you, get out!

He pulls the GIRL out of the YOUTH's grasp and flings her to one side, then after a short struggle with the YOUTH, JOHNSON picks up a knife from the nearest table and in a blind fury, grunting, he repeatedly stabs the YOUTH, who sinks, moaning. JOHNSON, exhausted, panting, leans against the nearest table. The GIRL gives a scream and hurries across to the YOUTH, raising his head from the floor. Neither is wearing a mask now, and we recognise them as FREDa and RICHARD.

FREDa (*in anguish*): Richard, Richard!

JOHNSON *turns and bends down and looks with horror into the two faces, then comes staggering down.*

JOHNSON (*whispering in horror*): Freda! Richard! Oh God!—I didn't know. I didn't know.

All the night club people, guests and waiters, all masked, now come crowding down, moving slowly in a dense mass, hiding FREDa and RICHARD. They all make a strange hissing sound.

JOHNSON (*still whispering*): Oh God! What did I do?

A VOICE FROM THE CROWD (*frightened*): He's coming, he's coming.

The crowd now changes its hissing to a queer low moaning and they all point forward, while slowly retreating. JOHNSON notices this.

JOHNSON (*in dull, hopeless tone*): Something terrible comes . . . terrible to them, but no longer terrible to me, because now I am already in Hell. . . . There cannot be a deeper Hell than this. . . . I see now that Hell is only a place where you can still think and remember. . . . I am not afraid. . . . I can even hope, for perhaps I only wait my turn to be blotted out, a thing badly made at last thrown on the dust heap. . . .

The crowd have vanished now. There is no light anywhere but on JOHNSON himself, who is looking towards us. Now the music, which has been keeping up a thin high tremulo, flares into heavy menacing brass, with the theme we heard at the end of ACT I. A tall, majestic, cloaked figure now appears, walking into the scene from our side of it. As soon as he is near JOHNSON, he turns and we see again the terrible shining death's head. There is a pause.

JOHNSON: If you are Death, I hope you are his very self, final, omnipotent, extinguishing for ever the last glimmer of memory. . . . If you are that Death, I am not afraid. . . . I welcome you. . . . Come, blot me out for good and all . . . that is all I am fit for, to be destroyed.

THE FIGURE (*in deep mocking tone*): And what of the thudding of the clay on the coffin, the white maggots and the worms?

JOHNSON: Now that I still live but am in Hell, they are a kind of peace. The world will be cleaner when my brain has rotted and the worms have eaten me to the bone. (*A pause, then loudly, angrily.*) Well—have you no force in your arm or even no quick poison in your breath?

THE FIGURE (*removing mask, calmly*): I said you were a fool, Robert.

JOHNSON (*staring*): You again!

THE FIGURE (*rather amused*): A fool, I said, Robert.

JOHNSON (*tragically*): You do not know me. I am worse than a fool now.

THE FIGURE (*coolly*): No, no. Don't flatter yourself.

JOHNSON (*distressed*): Didn't you see? My own daughter—my son—were here—and I—and I—oh! horrible, horrible!

THE FIGURE (*going over to him*): There are no human instruments created solely for our satisfaction, Robert. There are only persons. They are all sons and daughters, you see.

JOHNSON: I see that—and a thousand other things—now. But too late! My own children——

THE FIGURE (*sharply*): No, no. Masks and shadows and dreams!

JOHNSON (*vehemently*): They came here, I tell you, and I didn't know them—and I——

THE FIGURE (*with authority*): They never came here. Listen!

RICHARD'S VOICE (*exactly as in last scene*): I thought I'd tell him it was all right and I was sorry and all that, but it was too late then—he couldn't understand what anybody was saying to him.

FREDA'S VOICE (*as before*): Perhaps if you thought it, he got it somehow. You know, I used to think of him as being quite old——

RICHARD'S VOICE (*as before*): Lord yes!—so did I. Terribly old.

FREDA'S VOICE (*as before*): I know. Well, just lately I've suddenly seen he isn't really old—I mean—he wasn't. . . .

JOHNSON: Thank God for His mercy! If they were only shadows, that is no merit of mine. What I d.d, I did.

THE PLAYS OF J. B. PRIESTLEY

THE FIGURE: No, for these shadows were of your own making, and it was yourself reproaching yourself. Listen!

CLERGYMAN'S VOICE: If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die. Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners. . . .

JOHNSON (*alarmed*): A funeral service?

THE FIGURE: Yours.

JOHNSON: They think I'm dead?

THE FIGURE: Yes.

JOHNSON (*agitated*): And there they are—Jill, Freda, Richard—unhappy. And I'm here. Oh—horrible! What a swine I am!

THE FIGURE (*cheerfully, but gently*): No, no. A fool perhaps, an average sort of fool. (*Pauses, considering him.*) Robert, I think you'd better go on to the Inn now.

JOHNSON (*sharply*): I want to go back to my home, to tell them I'm not really dead—to try and comfort them.

THE FIGURE (*with great authority*): You can't go back. In that world you *are* really dead. To try and force your way back there would be to bring evil into your own house. You must take your road. But you can stay a little while at the Inn first.

JOHNSON: What inn is this?

THE FIGURE: Call it, if you like, the Inn at the End of the World. They are expecting you there.

JOHNSON: I have no money now. I flung it all away.

THE FIGURE: You will not need any.

JOHNSON: What shall I find there?

THE FIGURE: I do not know what things have illuminated your mind and touched your heart.

JOHNSON: But how do I go there?

THE FIGURE: That way will do.

He points, and JOHNSON turns. The small door behind him is now slowly opening and through it is flooding a golden light, very bright on the darkened stage. Very faintly we hear an exquisite strain of music.

THE FIGURE: And I hope you will be happy there.

JOHNSON (*sadly*): I don't deserve to be happy.

FIGURE (*in a ringing tone*): Then I think you may be.

As JOHNSON moves slowly towards the open door and the light and the music swells up, down comes the curtain and the Act is at an end.

ACT III

Once again we see the hall of JOHNSON'S house, but now it is early evening, two days after the funeral, and the house looks much warmer and more cheerful than it did before. Through the door from the drawing-room come MR. CLAYTON and RICHARD. They go to the stand for MR. CLAYTON'S hat and coat.

RICHARD: It was awfully good of you to come along, Mr. Clayton.

CLAYTON: No, no. Least I could do—help to get things straightened out for you. (*Pauses, regarding him.*) You're uncommonly like your father, y'know.

RICHARD (*pleased*): That's what a lot of people say.

CLAYTON: Yes, you remind me of him as he was when he first came to us as a junior clerk—though he'd be younger then than you are now.

RICHARD: Yes, he was.

CLAYTON (*a reminiscent old gentleman*): A bit careless at first, of course, like all youngsters, but a wonderfully steady and dependable fellow once he'd settled down. I was just remembering, in there, the time when I first promoted him to his own desk. We used to make a little ceremony of it in those days in the City—glass of wine together, that sort of thing.

GEORGE NOBLE and FREDa now come out of the drawing-room, and CLAYTON, ready to go, looks across at NOBLE.

CLAYTON: I don't think you go my way, Mr. Noble, do you?

NOBLE: No, 'fraid I don't.

CLAYTON: Well, I'll be going. (*Shaking hands with NOBLE and FREDa.*) And my best respects to your mother, young lady. Good night.

NOBLE AND FREDa: Good night.

RICHARD goes out with CLAYTON, while NOBLE and FREDa go to the stand for NOBLE'S hat and coat, and NOBLE continues a conversation obviously begun in the drawing-room.

NOBLE: Yes, he was a fine chap all right, Robert was. Always said so, ever since we stopped fighting when we were kids. He did me many a good turn.

FREDa: I'm glad.

THE PLAYS OF J. B. PRIESTLEY

NOBLE (*suddenly remembering with humorous emphasis*): Mind you, Freda, I once did him a *tremendous* good turn. In fact, if I hadn't, you wouldn't be here.

FREDA (*amused*): Why? What do you mean?

NOBLE (*chuckling*): It was I who first introduced your father to your mother. At a dance—oh—must be nearly thirty years ago. I was thinking about it when we were talking in there. Funny how these things suddenly come back. I could almost remember the very tunes they played that night. (*They move.*)

FREDA (*going*): I wish you'd tell me sometime, Uncle George.

NOBLE (*going*): Tell you what, Freda?

FREDA (*smilingly, as they are at door*): Tell me what were the tunes they played that night at the dance.

They have gone out, and now, from the opposite side, JILL enters slowly, stopping before she arrives in the centre. She is still in black, of course, but she is no longer the wan figure we saw before.

FREDA and RICHARD, talking quietly, come in from the other side.

FREDA suddenly sees her mother standing there.

FREDA (*happily surprised*): Why—mother—you look different.

JILL (*smiling, holding out a hand*): I know, darling—and I feel different. (*They go over to her.*) You see, I know. I suddenly saw—quite clearly—everything's all right—really all right—now. . . .

And as she smiles at her children, the light fades quickly, the scene goes, as we hear music again, first rather sombre but then quickening to a delicious little tune. . . .

. . . We still hear the tune softly as we look at the Inn, which seems—as we shall soon hear it is—a run place. At one side a large staircase comes down, almost at right angles to our line of sight, and underneath this staircase, where it makes a little wall, facing us, is a kind of cosy corner, with a small dining-table and some chairs, some bookshelves let into the wall, a curtained window, and a few framed photographs and small oldish pictures. On the other side is a large window, through which light is streaming. Farther back there does not seem to be anything very much—we merely have a vague impression of a high curtain making a shadowy back wall. JOHNSON enters, wearing a thick travelling overcoat and underneath that a country suit. He is just removing his bowler hat. Behind him there enters the inn PORTER, a stalwart, pleasant-faced fellow, who is carrying JOHNSON'S small bag. JOHNSON looks about him, still bewildered but now quite pleasantly bewildered.

PORTER: Now, sir, I'll put your bag and coat where I can lay hands on 'em the minute they're wanted.

JOHNSON (*handing over his hat and coat*): Good!

PORTER (*who has taken the coat*): Nice thick coat too, sir—and you're quite right, for it gets cold here late at night. High up, you see, that's what we are—high up, Mr. Johnson.

JOHNSON (*surprised*): How do you know my name?

PORTER (*smiling*): Oh—we were expecting you.

JOHNSON: But I don't see how you could have been expecting me.

PORTER (*who is perhaps more artful than he looks*): Why, sir, don't you like being expected?

JOHNSON: Well—yes—— I suppose we all do.

PORTER (*as if that settles it*): Well, there you are, sir.

JOHNSON *gives him a puzzled glance, then moves down a pace or two, looking about him. Then he sees that the PORTER is still waiting, as if for a tip, and so feels in his pockets.*

JOHNSON: Oh—er—sorry. I don't seem to have any money with me.

PORTER (*coming forward again*): That's all right, sir. Don't take money here. No use for it. But—there's other and better ways of saying "Thank you", y'know, sir.

JOHNSON (*staring at him*): I don't understand you. (*Then, with sudden recognition.*) Here, but wait a minute! I know you.

PORTER (*pleased*): Ah—now then, you're talking, sir. And that's what we like here. No money—but just what you did now, sir—letting your face light up.

JOHNSON (*triumphantly*): I know—I know!

PORTER (*chuckling*): Are you sure, sir?

JOHNSON (*triumphantly*): Yes, of course, I am. You're Jim Kirkland.

PORTER: Right, sir! Dead right!

JOHNSON (*all happy reminiscence*): Why, Jim, you were one of my great heroes. Good Lord!—I remember my father taking me to the Lancashire match for a birthday treat—I must have been about twelve—and I saw you make a hundred and seventy-eight not out. What an innings! Comes back to me now, clear as crystal. A smoking hot morning in July. I can smell the tar on the streets. I can taste the ginger beer I had. I can still see your bat flashing in the sun. What a day! Jim Kirkland—— (*He shakes hands with boyish enthusiasm.*) This is a great moment for me.

PORTER: Proud and happy, sir, proud and happy!

JOHNSON: There's a poem about old cricketers, Jim. Did you ever read it? How did it end? "As the run-stealers flicker to and fro, to and fro—— Oh—my Hornby and my Barlow long ago."

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PORTER: That's it, sir. Well—— (*As if about to go.*)

JOHNSON: But what are *you* doing here?

PORTER (*smiling*): Why, sir, meeting you. (*Confidentially.*) It's a rum place, this, you'll see.

JOHNSON (*dropping his voice a little*): I know. That window. Already, outside, it keeps changing.

He looks towards the corner under the staircase, and as soon as he does this, a warm light illuminates this corner and the little pictures and photographs seem to glow.

JOHNSON: And I'm sure some of these pictures and photographs—— (*Goes to examine them.*) Why, that's the photograph we had taken at school. I haven't seen it for over thirty years. (*Sees others.*) And this used to be in my bedroom at home. It's the very same one. And that. No—this wasn't at home—it was at my grandfather's—I used to stare at it for hours—— Good Lord!—I know them all, every one. That one I bought myself, first I ever bought—cost me twelve-and-six at a little second-hand shop. You're right, Jim—— (*He turns round.*) —This is a——

But the PORTER has gone. JOHNSON is bewildered. We hear, very faintly, the children's prayer theme from Humperdinck's opera. JOHNSON sits down, and now a woman's voice is heard, as if reading to a child.

WOMAN'S VOICE: Near a great forest there lived a poor wood-cutter with his wife and his two children. The boy was called Hansel and the girl Gretel. The wood-cutter was very poor indeed, and once when there was a famine in that land he could no longer give his wife and children their daily bread. . . .

JOHNSON (*sharply, unconsciously*): Mother!

But the voice has stopped. A little waiter has appeared, an oldish chap with white hair and a droll withered-apple face, and as soon as we have a good look at him we can see the old clown look he has. He has one of those rusty Cockney voices so many of the old comedians had, and his name is ALBERT GOOP.

ALBERT: Mr. Johnson, isn't it, sir?

JOHNSON: Yes.

ALBERT (*smiling*): You'll find everything ready, sir, when you are. The lady was in early, telling me what you liked.

JOHNSON (*surprised*): The lady?

ALBERT: Yes, sir, *your* lady. (*Now, with deliberate comical air.*) So you'll find everything in good trim. I say you'll find everything in good trim.

JOHNSON (*staring at him*): I say—now—wait a minute—

ALBERT (*who can't wait*): Yes, sir. Albert Goop. In the pantomimes at the old Theatre Royal.

JOHNSON (*triumphantly*): Of course!

ALBERT (*almost doing his old act now*): Right, sir. And don't forget the little cane. (*Produces one.*) I say don't forget the little cane.

JOHNSON: You used to be the Baron in *Cinderella* and the captain of the ship in *Robinson Crusoe*, and you always had your little cane, and said things twice. I used to spend hours and hours imitating you when I was a kid. Why, we all worshipped you, Albert Goop!

ALBERT (*completely the comedian now, doing steps and everything*): Every Christmas at the old Theatre Royal, Longfield, there was Albert with his cane and a big red nose. I say there was Albert with his cane and a big red nose. Ah—happy days, sir, happy days!

JOHNSON: Lord!—I'd count the weeks to those pantomimes—and the next sight of you, Albert.

ALBERT (*doing a droll step*): Thank you very much. (*And now JOHNSON says it with him and does the step too.*) I say thank you very much.

JOHNSON *laughs, then stares in astonishment out of the window, finally grinning like a schoolboy.*

JOHNSON: Albert—I distinctly saw a stage coach go down that road—and I'll swear Mr. Pickwick was on it, with Sam Weller—and—I think—fat old Mr. Weller was driving. What do you think about that, Albert?

ALBERT: Doesn't surprise me. I say it doesn't surprise me. You can see anything through that window. I once saw 'alf the bill at the old Middlesex through it—Dan Leno, R. G. Knowles, Lottie Collins, everybody—then—gone like a puff o' smoke—I say gone like a puff o' smoke.

JOHNSON: By jove, Albert—you know, Jim Kirkland's right. It's a rum place, this.

ALBERT: Rum! It's the rummest you ever saw, this is. Why, it hasn't started on you yet. You wait—I say you wait.

JOHNSON: Wait for what, Albert?

ALBERT: Now don't ask questions, sir. Just let things happen. That's the way to go on here, sir—just let things happen.

JOHNSON: Then I'll wait for the lady, Albert.

ALBERT: She'll appreciate it, sir. I say she'll appreciate it.

They are now standing together near the foot of the stairs, and

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from farther up the stairs we hear the sound of a boy's voice. They both look up.

BOY'S VOICE: Well, where is he then? I want to talk to him.

JOHNSON (*startled*): Why, that's Tom's voice.

ALBERT: Your brother, sir?

JOHNSON: Yes, but he was killed in the War——

ALBERT (*baffled*): War? What war?

TOM comes running down the stairs. He is a fine-looking lad in his middle teens, dressed in the style of thirty-five years ago.

TOM: Bob, you chump! Now then, Albert, buzz off—this is private. (ALBERT goes.) Just like you, Bob, to be so slow. You ought to have known this is the place to be in. Always keep me waiting, you old fat-head.

JOHNSON (*slowly, rather painfully*): Sorry, Tom. I didn't—well, I suppose I didn't know the way——

TOM (*indicating the window*): Look there!

JOHNSON (*staring*): Why—it's exactly what we used to see from our bedroom at that farm we stayed at those three summers. Look—the two haystacks—the road dipping down—the pond we had the raft on—that old cart——

TOM: The one you fell off, you ass.

JOHNSON (*a boy again*): Well, don't forget you fell in the pond.

As he looks again, we hear the music that JOHNSON listened to in the office, and now the girl's voice comes in again, high and trailing.

JOHNSON listens—then speaks very quietly.

JOHNSON: I've heard that before, in the strangest places, and it never lasts long. But at least it seems to belong here, and it never did anywhere before.

TOM: What are you talking about?

JOHNSON: Didn't you hear it?

TOM: I didn't hear anything. Oh—Lord!—look who's here.

MORRISON, a pleasant-looking, middle-aged schoolmaster, wearing an old blazer and smoking a pipe, has just entered, in the corner by the staircase, and now the warm light comes on there.

JOHNSON (*turning*): Mr. Morrison!

MORRISON (*coolly*): Hello! Both Johnsons at once.

TOM: Yes, sir, but I'm pushing off. See you later, Bob.

JOHNSON (*with sudden urgency*): Tom!

TOM (*cheerfully, in a hurry, going upstairs*): All right, chump, I'll

see you later. I want to talk to old funny-face upstairs about some bait he promised me.

JOHNSON (*going to foot of stairs and calling, distressed*): Tom! Tom!

MORRISON (*as JOHNSON slowly comes nearer*): Tom's had enough of my company. I'm afraid he doesn't like schoolmasters, even out of hours. (*Pauses, then noting JOHNSON's distress.*) Hello, what's worrying you, Robert?

JOHNSON (*with an effort*): It was—only seeing Tom again—after so long a time——

MORRISON: Ah—there's none of that time here, y'know. You must have brought a bit of it with you. Odd place this, Robert. Noticed the books?

JOHNSON (*in boyish tones*): No, sir.

MORRISON (*smiling*): And I imagined I'd taught you to appreciate good literature. Have a look.

JOHNSON (*going up to the books*): Why, they're all my old ones. Here's my old copy of *Don Quixote*. (*Turns the pages.*) With all the pictures. I remember the first time I read this. It was one Christmas, a real snowy Christmas, and I'd had to go to bed with a snivelling cold—and I remember curling up in bed, very cosy, with the snow thickening on the window panes and the cold blue daylight dying—and first staring at the pictures——

As he stands there, saying this, with the book in his hand, the light in that corner fades rapidly, and a bright moonlight streams through the window opposite, and we hear a lance tapping at the sill. The next moment, DON QUIXOTE, wearing old armour but no head-piece, is standing there, his white hair and beard and long lined fantastic face very sharply defined by the light, which also catches JOHNSON'S face in a moment or two, when he steps forward.

DON QUIXOTE (*gravely*): Your pardon, sirs, but this night should bring me to one of the most famous adventures that ever was seen, for this whole region abounds with wicked enchanters and there are great wrongs to be redressed. . . .

JOHNSON (*stepping forward, eagerly*): Yes, just the same. Don Quixote, you don't know me, but I remember you.

DON QUIXOTE: I seem to remember a boy in an upstairs room of a small house, far away, one winter's night——

JOHNSON (*eagerly*): Yes, I was that boy. But I didn't think you'd remember.

DON QUIXOTE (*with a noble breadth*): Sir, your imagination, your memory of us, your affection for us, these are our life—all that we have.

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JOHNSON: Yes, I think I understand that.

DON QUIXOTE: Your great poet once said that the best of our kind are but shadows, though I think he knew that your kind too—who appear so solid to yourselves for a little time—are also only shadows. And perhaps you too take life from the mind that beholds you and your little tale, so that you live as we must do, in another and greater being's imagination, memory and affection. (*Pauses.*) Do you notice any change in me?

JOHNSON (*gently, hesitantly*): Only—perhaps—you seem a trifle older—

DON QUIXOTE (*sadly*): Yes. You see, we are being forgotten. We are shadows even to shadows, and play in a dream within a dream.

JOHNSON (*with feeling*): I am glad to have seen you again, Don Quixote.

DON QUIXOTE (*in new and ringing tone*): Sir, I take life from your remembrance. If you should see my squire, Sancho Panza, tell him to follow me instantly along the highroad. Farewell, good sirs.

He salutes them and disappears. The bright moonlight goes with him, and now JOHNSON is back in the lighted corner, looking at the books again.

JOHNSON: Yes, yes. They're all my old ones. *Grimm's Fairy Tales*. *The Arabian Nights* I used to crayon. The Shakespeare I had at school with you.

As he stands there, with MORRISON, looking at the books, we hear voices, masculine and feminine, not coming from any one place, speaking famous lines.

A VOICE: Daffodils,
That come before the swallow dares and take
The winds of March with beauty . . .

ANOTHER VOICE: Will no one tell me what she sings?
Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
For old, unhappy, far-off things
And battles long ago. . . .

ANOTHER VOICE:
The long day wanes; the slow moon climbs; the deep
Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,
'Tis not too late to seek a newer world. . . .

ANOTHER VOICE: I cannot praise a fugitive and cloister'd virtue,
unexercised and unbreath'd, that never sallies out and sees her
adversary. . . .

ANOTHER VOICE: Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken. . . .

Men must endure
Their going hence, even as their coming hither:
Ripeness is all . . .

ANOTHER VOICE: The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want . . .

JOHNSON (*sitting, slowly and regretfully*): Ever since I saw you last, these many years, I think I have been foolish and ignorant, for you taught me long ago that in these voices, which come so quickly when we call on them, I would find wisdom and beauty. Though I remembered this, and sometimes, when business was not pressing and pleasure began to pall, I heard echoes of the voices again, I did not ask them to give me their treasure. But always I felt there was a time ahead when at last I could sit by the fire and listen to them again; and now it seems there is no such time for me, only this brief last hour. . . .

MORRISON: It doesn't matter, Robert. We don't know what Time is, let alone how it shall be divided for us. And this isn't the last frontier of Beauty. (*In brisker tone.*) I'm glad to have seen you again, Robert.

JOHNSON (*a boy again, shyly*): And I you, sir. I always liked you the best, y'know, sir.

MORRISON (*smiling*): If you hadn't I shouldn't have been here. Well—I must go.

As MORRISON goes, a barman in a striped jacket comes round the corner of the staircase into the little scene, carrying a tray with two wine-glasses on it. This BARMAN approaches JOHNSON as the latter watches MORRISON go.

BARMAN: Here you are, Mr. Johnson. Nice glass o' wine too.

JOHNSON (*turning*): Oh—thanks. Here, I say, I've seen you before somewhere.

BARMAN: Now I'll bet you can't remember, Mr. Johnson. I said to Albert when I begged him to let me bring these in and just do something for you, I said: "I'll bet he won't remember me."

JOHNSON: A street somewhere . . . a wet night. . . .

BARMAN: You're getting it, sir, you're getting it. I was down and out, and I'd been along to a place near Cheapside to try and get a caretaker's job, and I hadn't got it and I felt like chucking myself in the river. And I stopped you and asked you if you could spare a copper—

JOHNSON: Yes, I remember now. I'd just had a bit of luck at the office.

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BARMAN: You said so, when you gave me that ten bob. And that ten bob made all the difference. It made me feel better, to start with, and then I spent it getting a train up to my sister's, and her husband found me a bit of a job, and so I started all over again. In a few months I was a different chap altogether from the one that stopped you that night. All on account o' that ten bob, Mr. Johnson.

JOHNSON: Yes, but how do you know my name?

BARMAN (*chuckling*): Ah—there isn't much we don't know round here, sir. Well, now, Mr. Clayton ordered these two glasses of wine.

JOHNSON (*surprised*): Mr. Clayton?

BARMAN: That's right, sir. Your boss, isn't he?

JOHNSON: He was.

BARMAN: And your friend too before you'd finished, eh, sir?

JOHNSON: Yes, my friend too.

BARMAN (*chuckling*): Wouldn't be here if he wasn't. And here he is, right on the dot.

And so he is, not the CLAYTON we met in the hall, of course, but twenty-five years younger, dressed in business clothes of a pre-War cut. He is in good spirits, all smiling.

CLAYTON: Ah—thanks. (BARMAN goes. JOHNSON and CLAYTON both take glasses.) Well, Johnson, I'm glad you could join me in a glass of wine.

JOHNSON (*shyly, the junior clerk again*): It's very good of you, Mr. Clayton.

CLAYTON: Not at all. Always our custom here, y'know.

JOHNSON (*eagerly, hopefully*): Sir—you don't mean——?

CLAYTON (*significantly*): Yes, my dear fellow. (*Raising glass.*) The firm!

JOHNSON (*raising his glass*): The firm! (*They drink.*)

CLAYTON (*sitting down*): Yes, Johnson, your probationary period is now over. We all feel you've worked very well. We all like you. And now I'm glad to say you may consider yourself definitely one of the London staff of Bolt, Cross and Clayton. And it will be your own fault, not ours, if you aren't with us a long time.

JOHNSON (*pleased*): I hope I am, sir.

CLAYTON: I hope so too. From now on, you'll have your own desk, of course, and the board has decided to raise your salary in accordance with our usual custom—by—seventy-five pounds a year.

JOHNSON (*delighted*): Thank you, sir. I'll try to do my best for the firm.

CLAYTON: That's all we ask, Johnson. Let's see—you're not married yet?

JOHNSON (*shyly*): No, Mr. Clayton.

CLAYTON: Thinking of it?

JOHNSON (*grinning, awkwardly*): Well—no—I'm not, sir. Haven't met her yet.

CLAYTON (*jovially*): You will, you will. You look to me like a marrying man, Johnson. (*Rising.*) Well, best of luck. I won't keep you. Expect you want to dance.

JOHNSON (*puzzled*): To dance?

The lights change, and now the staircase and all the space behind are lit with a greeny-blue light that has something ghostly about it, although it is by no means dim and subdued. The orchestra is softly playing the "Valse Bleu". A group of young people, girls and young men, all in pre-War evening clothes, come down the stairs, laughing and flirting, and then go waltzing away. The last to come down is GEORGE NOBLE, now a young sprig in his early twenties, with a glass of claret cup in his hand.

CLAYTON: There you are, you see.

He goes out, chuckling, and now the warm light in this cosy corner fades out, but where NOBLE is standing near the bottom of the stairs is now strongly lit, and JOHNSON walks into this light. The greeny-blue light has gone. We can only see JOHNSON and NOBLE, but we can still hear, very faintly, the "Valse Bleu".

NOBLE (*excitedly*): Well, Bob, don't say I never do you a good turn.

JOHNSON (*puzzled*): All right. But why, George?

NOBLE: Don't be an ass. You asked me to find out who she is, and I've found out who she is.

JOHNSON (*puzzled*): Who she is? (*But now he is suddenly young again, at that dance, waiting to be told who she is.*) Yes, of course. Sorry, George! Good work, old boy! Well, who is she? Where does she live?

NOBLE: That's better. Now that I've pulled it off, I thought you were going to have the cheek to pretend it didn't matter and you weren't completely dotty on the girl not half an hour ago.

JOHNSON (*eagerly*): Come on! Who is she?

NOBLE: Her name's Jill Gregg, and her mother's a widow, and they live out at Richmond.

JOHNSON (*slowly, wonderingly*): Jill Gregg—Jill!

NOBLE: And I've been introduced, and now I can introduce you, so what more do you want?

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JOHNSON (*eagerly*): Nothing—except lead me to her.

NOBLE: Yes, if you don't look pretty smart about it, I'll eut you out myself. And even if I don't, there are plenty more who will, especially a hefty ehappie with a dragoon's moustache, who's putting in some heavy work with her.

JOHNSON (*gaily*): He won't have a chanee. I'll show him.

NOBLE: All right, well get this into your fat head. I'll meet you outside the supper room in about ten minutes, and I'll have her there waiting for you—even if I've to have that bloke with the moustache thrown out. Right?

JOHNSON (*with enthusiasm*): George, you're a brick.

NOBLE: I know. Not that I think you'll get anywhere with her. Too much elass for you, my boy—you'll see. Still, you can try. Outside the supper room—in ten minutes.

NOBLE *goes waltzing away*. JOHNSON *steps forward, as the lights begin to fade near the bottom of the staircase and come into the corner where the table and chairs are*.

JOHNSON: Good old George! (*Slowly, tasting it.*) Jill. Jill Gregg. . . . Jill. . . . Richmond. . . . (*Then exultantly, as if remembering everything.*) Yes, yes. My Jill!

Now there enters into the corner a small bearded doctor, dressed in the style of 1914, still putting away the last of his things into his black bag.

DOCTOR (*with mock sternness*): Mr. Johnson!

JOHNSON (*coming forward, now an anxious young husband*): Yes—doctor?

DOCTOR: Didn't I tell you to clear out and stay out for a few hours—to take a walk—or play billiards—or even get drunk——?

JOHNSON (*apologetically*): I know. But I simply couldn't. I had to come baek. (*Almost sweating with anxiety.*) Doctor—is it—is it—going to be all right?

DOCTOR (*teasing him*): As I told you before, why be so suspicious? Your wife's a sound healthy young woman, who's doing what Nature wants her to do.

JOHNSON (*gloomily*): I know. But Nature can want you to do something and then go and let you down when you do it.

DOCTOR (*easily*): Ah—that's where Science has to step in. (*In ordinary conversational style, though really teasing.*) I don't like this business over in Ireland. Officers at the Curragh saying they won't obey their own government. Can't have that, can we? But I've always been a Home Ruler myself. Are you?

JOHNSON (*who can't take this stuff in*): Oh—I dunno——

DOCTOR (*this is his opportunity*): Come, come, Mr. Johnson! A man in your position ought to take more interest in these things. We fathers—y'know——

JOHNSON (*staggered*): Fathers! Has it—happened?

DOCTOR: Of course it has. A fine boy—nearly eight pounds.

JOHNSON (*with tremendous excitement*): Oh—Christmas!—and how's Jill—my wife——?

DOCTOR (*smiling*): She's all right. Came through it very well. (*Suddenly stern.*) But you can't see her until nurse gives the word. (*At the door.*) Be sensible now!

JOHNSON (*enormously relieved and elated*): Sensible! Sensible be damned! I could pull up oak trees. (*The DOCTOR has gone now and the light in this corner is fading.*) Jill's all right. A boy—a fine boy—eight pounds of him. Oh gosh! Just what she wanted. A girl next—yes, must have a girl. A boy—then a girl——

As he says this, brilliant sunlight comes flashing through the window, and there, framed in it, are RICHARD and FREDa, gay in holiday clothes and a few years younger, perhaps, than they were in the hall scenes. In high spirits, they call through the open window.

RICHARD: Hoy, hoy! Dad!

FREDa (*gaily*): Don't pretend not to know us.

JOHNSON (*as he turns to look at them*): Here—wait a minute—(*for at this moment he does not know them.*)

RICHARD: Now, Dad, no funny stuff!

FREDa (*excitedly*): We got right to the top and saw for hundreds of miles, didn't we, Dick?

RICHARD (*who thinks he's a realist*): Well—fifty miles.

FREDa: Oh—much more than that. And some of it was awfully hard going——

RICHARD (*grinning*): She screeched in one place.

FREDa (*indignantly*): That was only because I tore my stocking. You know it was.

RICHARD: Oh well—she wasn't bad, really.

FREDa: And we had a marvellous day, except that you weren't with us. (*Pauses.*) What's the matter?

JOHNSON (*who has gone closer*): I'm sorry. I was just thinking—you're a fine pair—just what——

RICHARD: Now, Dad, stop it.

FREDa: Daddy, no teasing.

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JOHNSON (*as it dawns*): Yon're my children?

FREDA: Of course we are.

JOHNSON (*hastily*): Yes, yes, of course you must be. Oh—this is great, isn't it? I'm sorry I was so stupid.

FREDA: Don't you want us?

JOHNSON: Of course I do. I tell you, it's—tremendous. Come inside, come in at once and talk to me.

RICHARD: No, Dad.

FREDA: We both agreed that wouldn't do, not to-night.

RICHARD: You don't want us here to-night.

JOHNSON (*bewildered*): I don't. How do you know I don't?

FREDA: We know the pair of you, when you're together, won't want us.

JOHNSON: The pair of us?

FREDA (*enthusiastically*): Yes. But to-morrow we'll all have an enormous day. And you're not to be lazy.

RICHARD (*also with enthusiasm*): We'll start just after breakfast, and climb everything there is.

JOHNSON (*dubiously*): To-morrow . . . ?

RICHARD (*confidently*): Yes, to-morrow. Don't you believe in to-morrow?

FREDA (*laughingly*): To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow—(*Breaks off because she sees something in his face. Concerned now.*) What's the matter, father?

JOHNSON (*slowly*): Father! How strange that is! Frightening too!

FREDA: Tell us—please! You don't *tell* us enough.

RICHARD: That's true, Dad. Don't be so grand and aloof.

JOHNSON (*earnestly*): You know, I've never felt grand and aloof. Since you stopped being small children, I've simply been shy. Sometimes I've even grumbled, not because I wanted to, but because I couldn't find the sense and courage to say to you what I wanted to say. Will you forgive me?

FREDA: But there's nothing to forgive. And we knew how you felt.

RICHARD: Didn't you with your father?

JOHNSON (*slowly*): Yes, I suppose I did. But there ought to have been many a word spoken between us—I mean, between you two and me—when there was only silence or a stupid show of speech. I think I would have told you more if I'd felt I'd any real wisdom. But I felt I'd so little to give you worth having. For all I knew, you might have

already found a wisdom I could never find. You might have stumbled upon the clue that I always missed, the clue to everything, the secret. . .

FREDA (*eagerly, as music plays softly*): There is a secret, isn't there? Like living in a house where there's a hidden treasure. Oh—Dad—you feel just as I do.

RICHARD: I know. And I believe I've got hold of something.

FREDA (*excitedly*): Richard, you haven't! But don't tell us now. Let's *all* talk about it—to-morrow.

RICHARD (*eagerly*): Right! To-morrow, eh, Dad?

JOHNSON (*slowly, painfully*): Yes . . . let's do that . . . to-morrow. (*He waits a moment, then gently.*) Good-bye, children.

RICHARD: Not good-bye——

FREDA (*softly*): Just—good night, father. (*And the light is fading rapidly behind them, and they seem to be drifting away.*)

JOHNSON (*softly*): Good night, Richard. Good night, Freda. Good night.

They have gone and the window is dark, but now the warm light has come on again in the cosy corner below the staircase, and as JOHNSON stands for a moment, ALBERT GOOP comes bustling in, to clear away the wine-glasses before laying the table.

ALBERT: Everything looking nice and cosy, sir, eh? What do you think of this place?

JOHNSON (*sitting down, quietly*): I recognise it now, Albert.

ALBERT: So you've seen it before, eh?

JOHNSON: Yes, I've caught a glimpse of it many a time, awake and in dreams. But I've never been here long—never long.

ALBERT (*chuckling softly*): Ah—no—that's the trouble, sir.

JOHNSON (*very quietly*): Sometimes I only saw it from a long way off, just the smoke of it rising at the end of a good day. I think sometimes too, when I came nearer and the door opened for me, it all vanished, and I was left bewildered among the great clanking machinery of existence. But it was always here, waiting for me.

ALBERT: That's right, sir. I say that's right. Always waiting for you.

JOHNSON: I know I can't stay here long. I shall have to go soon. And still something—somebody—is missing. This isn't all. There's still an emptiness.

ALBERT (*chuckling, as he fusses with the glasses*): Yes—and why, sir? Because you're beginning to feel a bit lonely. Well, that's all right. I say that's all right. *They* know about that, and so of course they just keep you waiting long enough. Some calls that their artfulness—and

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so up to a point it is—but I say they know just what's right for a man, see, sir? Look at the very start of it all—Garden of Eden. Was Eve there right at the beginning? No fear. I say no fear! She waits a bit until he's feeling lonely, then up she pops and pretends she's just on time. *They know. I say they know. (Ready to go now.)* Well, sir, everything's ready when you are. *(As he moves away.)* I say everything's ready when you are. *(Stops, hearing sound upstairs.)* That's her now, sir, you'll see.

ALBERT retires, chuckling. JOHNSON goes to the foot of the stairs and looks up. Music begins, softly at first then swelling and surging. A misty light hovering over the staircase now becomes stronger as JILL appears, walking slowly down, looking radiant, dressed in whatever suits her best. JOHNSON stares up at her in wonder and admiration. She stops about two-thirds of the way down, and smiles at him.

JILL: Who am I, Robert?

JOHNSON (*slowly at first but with mounting excitement*): You are Jill, my wife. And you are Jill, the mother of my children. And you are Jill, the girl I saw for the first time at a dance nearly thirty years ago. And you are Jill the girl who had not yet been to that dance, who had never seen me, who dreamed perhaps of a lover and a husband very different from me. You are all those, and something more as well, something even more than the Jill who went with me on that wedding journey to Switzerland, so young, so happy. You are the essential Jill, whom I was for ever finding, losing, then finding again. You are my love, the wonder and terror and delight of my heart.

JILL (*moving slowly down to him*): Because at last you say that, I am happy. And like you, I am at peace. How strange it is! We have no more peace in ourselves than you have, but when you find peace in us, then we find it too. Perhaps that is why God created us men and women. *(She turns to the window, where bright moonlight is streaming through.)* Look! What do you see?

JOHNSON (*wonderingly, happily*): The moon begins to rise over the lake again, and the mountains are in deep shadow.

JILL: But already the highest peaks are silver.

JOHNSON: It's the same lake.

JILL: I remember every mountain top.

JOHNSON: We only had a fortnight there.

JILL (*hastily*): Less than that—twelve and half days.

JOHNSON (*happily*): We sat on the balcony, night after night, and watched that moonrise.

JILL: There was something about that lake—always—that caught at my heart—as you did, Robert.

JOHNSON: I felt then—and tried to say it too, but the words stuck in my throat—

JILL (*with laughing reproach*): Too many nice words stuck in that throat of yours, Robert.

JOHNSON: I know. I felt then that for once the world outside ourselves seemed to be the mirror of our hearts. (*To the scene outside.*) Good-bye.

JILL (*with a touch of alarm*): Why do you say that?

JOHNSON (*gently*): It seems to me to be fading. Perhaps a mist is coming over it. Sometimes, you remember, there were mists. (*The moonlight fades out, but as JILL goes closer to him, a warm sunlight begins to stream in, and she turns and sees it.*)

JILL (*looking out*): What do you see now?

JOHNSON (*staring*): Nothing much yet. Wait a minute, though. (*Ecstatically.*) Why, it's the little back garden of the bungalow, the first we ever had.

JILL (*quickly*): I can see my three rose bushes.

JOHNSON: Isn't my old deck-chair still out there?

JILL: Yes, and my gardening basket. I was so proud of that and really I didn't know a thing about gardening then.

JOHNSON: Lord!—I used to sit out there at the week-ends as if I were in the middle of a five-hundred-acre estate. And the way I used to trim that privet hedge!

JILL (*reproachfully, and suddenly taking the scene from the past into the present*): Oh!—Robert—you've left all that mess of stuff out there again. Look—that silly big ashtray and pipes and newspapers and that ridiculous old hat—

JOHNSON (*impatiently, also turning past into present*): Well, what does it matter? It's our garden and those are all my things.

JILL (*rather sharply now*): But they look so awful—just as if we didn't care how we looked—

JOHNSON (*more impatiently*): But we know we do care how we look—I mean, up to a point—but after all a garden's a place to enjoy yourself in—and—

JILL (*cutting in, sharply*): Yes, you've told me that a thousand times already. But it's no reason why a garden should look like a lumber room. And other people see it as well as ourselves—and goodness only knows what Mrs. Lee says about it.

JOHNSON (*exasperated*): But what the blazes does it matter what

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Mrs. Lee says or thinks about our garden? First, you tell me you can't stand the woman——

JILL (*sharply*): But can't you see that's all the more reason why we shouldn't give her an excuse to criticise us——

JOHNSON (*almost shouting now, across that old gulf between the sexes*): No, I can't see. It all sounds unreasonable and dam' silly to me——

JILL (*angrily, betrayed again*): That's because you're so selfish you look at everything just from your own point of view——

JOHNSON (*angrily*): No, I don't.

JILL (*who by this time has been deserted by husband and children, jeered at by all the neighbours, stoned through the streets*): Yes, you do. You never really *think* about me——

But as they stand and glare at each other, the light from the window begins to fade, as if to reproach them. JILL turns, dismayed.

JILL: Oh—it's going.

JOHNSON (*miserably*): Serves me right! Jill!

JILL (*tearful but glad*): Robert!

As they console each other, a rich warm intimate light comes on in the corner where the table is. JILL sees the table and goes over, JOHNSON following her.

JILL (*looking at table and things on it*): I remember this—you know—so well.

JOHNSON: Do you?

JILL: Yes, don't you?

JOHNSON (*considering the table*): Well, I suppose I would—if I ever remembered such things. Seems all a bit familiar.

JILL: It's all from the third holiday we had after we were married, when Richard was just beginning to walk.

JOHNSON (*astonished*): Can you remember?

JILL: Yes, everything with us in it. Streets, houses, tables, chairs, dishes, knives and forks. All laid out for ever in an enchanted country. Ours.

They have now sat down at the table, and ALBERT appears with a tray of magnificent things to eat and a bottle of wine.

ALBERT: There you are, sir! Everything that you specially fancy, and all snug and cosy. I say all snug and cosy.

JOHNSON: Yes—grand, Albert!

ALBERT (*indicating wine*): With the landlord's compliments, sir.

JOHNSON: We must drink his health. Jill—the landlord's health! (*They drink.*) By the way, who is the landlord?

ALBERT (*confidentially*): Couldn't exactly say, sir, and that's a fact, but I've had my suspicions. I say I've had my suspicions.

JOHNSON: What are they?

JILL (*rather hastily*): No, Robert, don't let's bother about him now.

ALBERT: Quite right, ma'am. Besides, there's the message he sent down to be attended to.

JOHNSON: What message? To me?

ALBERT: That's right, sir. He said: "Ask Mr. Johnson what time and place he'd like this to be while he's having his supper."

JOHNSON (*bewildered*): What time and place?

JILL: Yes, Robert. You can choose. Only don't choose something before I knew you—or I'll be out of it.

JOHNSON: Good lord—no! (*Thinks a moment.*) Now wait a minute. You know, my cousin George Noble came in and said he'd introduce us, just as he did at that Christmas dance, long ago——

JILL (*eagerly*): When we first met?

JOHNSON: Yes. I thought it was going to happen all over again, but it didn't. Now that's what we'd like, Albert.

ALBERT (*going*): The Christmas dance—ve-ery good, sir.

JOHNSON (*calling*): But—Albert!

ALBERT (*halting*): Sir?

JOHNSON: Could everybody be there, this time?

ALBERT: I'll pass the message on, sir. (*Hurries out.*)

JOHNSON (*with just the two of them, snug at the table*): You see, Jill, that was the very beginning for us. And we'll see the beginning again but now we shall know everything that came out of it. We'll be ourselves as we were then but we'll also be all the selves we've been since, so that we'll have *everything*.

JILL (*affectionately teasing*): Aren't you clever?

JOHNSON: Well, you must admit, it's a jolly good idea. Let's see—who gave that dance?

JILL (*promptly*): Some people called Williams.

JOHNSON: You remember everything.

JILL: I'm not likely to forget that. And the funny thing was, as I've told you before, I hardly knew them. And you didn't either, did you?

JOHNSON: No, they were friends of my uncle, George Noble's father. I spotted you the minute we arrived. You were waiting for somebody. I hung about, hoping somebody would introduce us——

JILL (*tenderly*): I know you did. And as a matter of fact I *wasn't*

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waiting for somebody. No, that's not true—I was. I was waiting for you.

As she puts a hand across the table and he takes it, the orchestra slides into the "Valse Bleue", the lovely greeny-blue, ghostly lights come on, illuminating the whole stage, and all the company come waltzing on from the back. There are the young people we saw before, and others too, and older people, all in the evening clothes of about 1912. In addition there are characters who have previously appeared in this Act, still wearing the same clothes as before, people like TOM, CLAYTON, MORRISON, and even FREDa and RICHARD. Except for the corner where JILL and JOHNSON are sitting, the whole stage is filled with these dancing figures. JOHNSON now turns and looks at them, all happy and excited, like a schoolboy.

JOHNSON (*with mounting excitement*): Look—there's good old George. It was he who did the trick for us that night. . . . Why, there's Tom . . . was he there? He might have been, though. . . . And Mr. Clayton . . . he wasn't there, of course. . . . And old Morrison from my school . . . glorious idea bringing him in. . . . Look, Jill—your mother, having a roaring good time . . . do you remember how suspicious of me she was at first? . . . I'll bet Don Quixote's somewhere about. . . . I had a talk to him. . . . And look—Richard—our Richard—that's cheek, if you like, coming to dance at the party where his mother met his father! . . .

RICHARD (*calling from the crowd of dancers*): Why don't you two dance?

JOHNSON (*in high spirits*): Why not? (*He jumps up and moves forward before turning*): Come on, Jill—we'll show them.

But now when he turns the corner is dark and JILL is no longer there. He is first bewildered, then terribly distressed.

JOHNSON: Jill! Jill! Where are you? Jill!

He is now almost in the centre of the stage, not far from the bottom of the staircase. The dancers are still, and the music has stopped. There is a moment's silence. Then comes the CLERGYMAN'S VOICE from somewhere far away.

CLERGYMAN'S VOICE: . . . Lettest thou thy servant depart in peace according to thy word. . . .

JOHNSON (*calling urgently among the deepening shadows*): Jill! Jill! Where are you? Jill!

The sombre theme, announced by heavy brass, that we have heard before is now heard again. THE FIGURE appears, tall, hooded, very impressive, on the staircase. A golden shaft of light, from below, illuminates him, and throws an immense shadow on the high curtain

at the back. There is a steely light on JOHNSON's face. The rest are in shadow.

THE FIGURE (*solemnly*): Robert Johnson, it is time for you to go.

THE CROWD (*drawing back, murmuring*): The landlord! The landlord!

THE FIGURE: Robert Johnson, you cannot stay here any longer.

JOHNSON (*urgently*): My wife was with me a moment ago. Now she's disappeared. I've lost her. And I must speak to her again.

THE FIGURE: There is no need.

JOHNSON (*very urgently*): Yes, I must.

THE FIGURE: Listen!

From somewhere far away, but very clear, come the voices of FRED A and JILL exactly as they spoke at the end of the little scene in the hall.

FRED A'S VOICE: Why—mother—you look different.

JILL'S VOICE: I know, darling—and I feel different. You see, I know. I suddenly saw—quite clearly—everything's all right—really all right—*now*. . . .

THE FIGURE: You understand? She knows already.

JOHNSON: Can she read my mind?

THE FIGURE: Perhaps she reads a little further than your mind.

JOHNSON: You can pull back that hood now and show your face, my friend who calls me fool.

THE FIGURE *pulls back the hood, the golden shaft of light grows stronger, and now instead of an indeterminate face there is the face of a handsome young man, like an Apollo.*

THE FIGURE: Yes, both are true. I have called you a fool, and I am your friend. And now you have a debt to discharge here.

JOHNSON: You said it would cost me nothing.

THE FIGURE: I said no money was necessary.

JOHNSON: Then how can I pay you?

THE FIGURE (*gravely*): With thanks. And then it is good-bye, Robert.

All the people in the crowd, now in deep shadow, begin to drift away, and as they go we just catch their low confused voices saying: "Good-bye Robert" and "Good-bye Johnson" and "Good-bye, Good-bye". And then JOHNSON is left a solitary figure in this steely shaft of light, while THE FIGURE, shining and golden, waits above on the stairs.

JOHNSON (*with deep emotion*):

I have been a foolish, greedy and ignorant man;

Yet I have had my time beneath the sun and stars;

I have known the returning strength and sweetness of the seasons,

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Blossom on the branch and the ripening of fruit,
The deep rest of the grass, the salt of the sea,
The frozen ecstasy of mountains.
The earth is nobler than the world we have built upon it;
The earth is long-suffering, solid, fruitful;
The world still shifting, dark, half-evil.
But what have I done that I should have a better world,
Even though there is in me something that will not rest
Until it sees Paradise . . . ?

(*With very great emotion.*)

Farewell, all good things!
You will not remember me,
But I shall remember you. . . .

THE FIGURE (*gravely*): Robert Johnson, it is time now.

And here is the PORTER, standing just behind JOHNSON with his hat and overcoat and bag.

PORTER: Your things, sir. (*Helps him on with his coat.*)

JOHNSON (*now with his overcoat on, holding his hat and bag, with an echo of childish accents*): For Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory . . . and God bless Jill and Freda and Richard . . . and all my friends—and—and—everybody . . . for ever and ever. . . . Amen. . . .

He puts on his hat and is now ready to go. He looks up at THE FIGURE, doubtfully.

JOHNSON (*hesitantly*): Is it—a long way?

THE FIGURE (*suddenly smiling like an angel*): I don't know, Robert.

JOHNSON (*awkwardly*): No . . . well . . . good-bye. . . .

A majestic theme has been announced, first only by the wood-wind. As JOHNSON still stands there, hesitating, the light on THE FIGURE fades, and then the whole staircase disappears, leaving JOHNSON alone. He looks very small, forlorn, for now the whole stage has been opened up to its maximum size, and there is nothing there but JOHNSON. The music marches on, with more and more instruments coming in. JOHNSON looks about him, shivering a little, and turning up the collar of his coat. And now there is a rapidly growing intense blue light; the high curtains have gone at the back, where it is bluer and bluer; until at last we see the glitter of stars in space, and against them the curve of the world's rim. As the brass blares out triumphantly and the drums roll and the cymbals clash, JOHNSON, wearing his bowler hat and carrying his bag, slowly turns and walks towards that blue space and the shining constellations, and the curtain comes down and the play is done.

MUSIC AT NIGHT

A Play in Three Acts

Music at Night—Copyright 1944, by J. B. Priestley.

CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

DAVID SHIEL
NICHOLAS LENGEL
MRS. AMESBURY
KATHERINE SHIEL
PETER HORLETT
ANN WINTER
PHILIP CHILHAM
LADY SYBIL LINCHESTER
SIR JAMES DIRNIE
CHARLES BENDREX
PARKS
RUPERT AMESBURY
MRS CHILHAM
TOM
DEBORAH
DR. EBENTHAL

The scene throughout is a large music-room in Mrs. AMESBURY's house in London. The action is continuous, and the time is an evening just before the war.

ACT I

Enter SHIEL carrying the score and LENGEL his violin. They are deep in technical talk.

SHIEL: We'll take the whole of the middle section of the first movement faster and harder than we did this afternoon.

LENGEL: All right, David. But I take it from you, remember.

SHIEL: I know. But if I'm still too slow and soft, whip it up.

LENGEL: I'll give it hell. (*Staring about him.*) Where do we play?

SHIEL (*pointing to recess as MRS. AMESBURY enters*): In there.

MRS. A. (*rather hastily*): I'd forgotten you hadn't played here before, Mr. Lengel. I've heard you play so often—and—well—so many people have played for me here—that I was forgetting.

LENGEL (*with touch of irony*): And now at last, Mrs. Amesbury—I am honoured.

MRS. A.: Thank you, though I don't believe for a moment you feel honoured. Why should you? Probably thinking, "Well, the old busybody's got me at last——"

LENGEL: Oh—no—please. Besides, I know what you have done for music—and especially for David here.

MRS. A.: I haven't done much, but at least I've tried. And as I told you, I've been excited about this concerto for weeks.

LENGEL: It's good. One of the best things he has done.

MRS. A.: Splendid! (*Moves towards recess with him.*) I must apologise for putting you in this recess, but I've always kept my piano there—and the platform helps enormously, I always think.

SHIEL (*reassuringly*): I've always liked it.

LENGEL: We're meant to be heard not seen.

MRS. A.: I'll send the others in. I warned you it would be the tiniest party—and of course as usual several people let me down at the last minute, telephoned to say they couldn't get back from the country in time—lazy lying brutes! So everybody's here except Charles Bendrex—and I *know* he's coming.

SHIEL (*impressed*): Bendrex, eh?

LENGEL: The Cabinet Minister?

MRS. A.: Yes. He's a very old friend of mine. He always says he adores music.

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LENGEL (*mockingly*): Can he mean it—an English politician?

MRS. A.: He says so, and grumbles because he's no longer any time to listen to it. So I insisted upon his coming here to-night. You know, David, he ought to be able to do something for you.

SHIEL: I know. If Bendrex likes the concerto to-night and then I go and die next week, he might be able to get Katherine awarded a Civil List pension of Fifty Pounds a Year.

LENGEL (*going towards recess*): What—fifty pounds of good government money—and they could have bought a nice bomb with it!

MRS. A. (*quickly, with lowered voice*): David—I hope you didn't mind my asking Sybil Linchester here to-night——

SHIEL (*rather stiffly*): Good Lord—no! Why should I?

MRS. A.: You see, I didn't want her here—you never know what mood she'll be in, and if she's feeling mischievous, she can just spoil everything—but she wanted to come and bring Sir James Dirnie—you know about those two, of course—everybody does——

SHIEL: Yes. I heard that Dirnie was running her——

MRS. A.: David, what a horrible phrase!

SHIEL: It was the least offensive I could think of.

MRS. A.: Well, as you know, Dirnie's terribly rich—and Sybil's now bringing him out as a patron of the arts—he's just given a few thousand to that opera scheme—and I thought it might help if he heard the concerto——

SHIEL: I hate to admit it, but I think it might.

MRS. A.: So that's why Sybil's here, drinking my best brandy as fast as she can get it down. I'm glad you don't mind her being here.

SHIEL: I repeat, why should I?

MRS. A. (*after looking at him hard*): I—seem to have heard something—once—a few years ago.

SHIEL: Ancient history—probably untrue.

MRS. A.: That's my tremendous age. I'm beginning to forget the difference a few years make when you're younger. Well, now—I'll go and collect them——

Enter KATHERINE SHIEL.

KATH.: Mrs. Amesbury, Mr. Bendrex has just arrived. You'd better look after him. He seems dreadfully tired.

MRS. A. (*as she goes*): Poor Charles—I'm afraid he is dreadfully tired these days.

Goes out.

KATH.: I didn't realise Mr. Bendrex is so terribly old. He looks—worn out. (*Looks at the two men.*) Well, chaps? All ready?

LENGEL: Katherine my dear—you're nervous.

KATH.: How do you know?

LENGEL: I know that look of yours. And *chaps*. That's not really you. And why be nervous? After all, these people—who are they?

KATH.: Rather grand, some of them, Nick.

LENGEL: You mean, they have their names in the newspaper. So do the tooth pastes and little liver pills.

KATH. (*playfully to SHIEL*): He's very cynical to-night.

LENGEL: Because it is Sunday night. I am always the same on Sunday night.

SHIEL: What do you think you are from Monday to Saturday—a little ray of sunshine?

KATH. (*hastily*): Listen, David, this is important. Philip Chilham's here——

SHIEL: The fellow who writes that awful column in the *Daily Gazette*? What does he know about music?

KATH.: Nothing, probably. But everybody seems to read his column. And he's just told me that Filderberg is on his way over from New York. He might take the concerto back with him, David.

SHIEL: He might, if I can get hold of him.

LENGEL: I wouldn't. You're a romantic——

SHIEL (*indignantly*): I'm not.

KATH.: Of course you are, David. Go on, Nick.

LENGEL: And Filderberg's very harsh and dry. A great technique of course—but you feel he's mocking the music he plays.

KATH.: But why should he?

LENGEL: He has gone sour. You know what happened to his family in Vienna—terrible! So now he seems to use his great technique to mock at music—at least, all tender, romantic music.

KATH.: But that's—*horrible*!

LENGEL: You may not have noticed, Katherine, but a lot of things now are horrible.

SHIEL: Including our performance of this last movement, Nick. I wish we could have had another go at it. Look!

As they look at score together, PETER HORLETT enters.

KATH. (*amused*): You look rather gloomy.

PETER: I feel gloomy.

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KATH.: I ought to warn you, it's my husband's concerto that's being inflicted on you.

PETER: Oh—you're Mrs. Shiel, are you? I'm Peter Horlett.

KATH.: I know. I read some poems of yours the other day.
(*Pauses.*)

PETER: Well?

KATH. (*laughingly*): I'd better wait until I know what you think of David's concerto.

PETER: That's not fair.

KATH.: All right. I liked some of them—very much. But if they're poems for the people, as you say they are, oughtn't you to write them so that the people will understand them?

PETER (*proudly*): They will understand them one day, when the masses come out of their dope.

ANN WINTER, *a pretty young thing, enters hurriedly.*

ANN (*excitedly*): Peter—Peter!

PETER (*with cheerful brutality*): Shut up, Ann. I'm talking.

ANN (*cheerfully to KATH.*): Hasn't he foul manners?

Addressing them both, very confidentially.

I say—I don't think Lady Sybil Linchester's *so* marvellous.

PETER (*with huge scorn*): Marvellous? She's poison. So's that fellow Dirnie. And Chilham. And that old stuffed shirt, Bendrex. All poison.

ANN (*still confidentially*): No. Old Mr. Bendrex is sweet. But I really can't see that the famous Lady Sybil——

PETER (*cuttingly*): *Snoops!* God, what a set! Snoops!

ANN: I really can't see she's so very wonderful. To begin with, she's getting ancient——

KATH.: Here, steady. I refuse to be ancienter still.

ANN: You're different, Mrs. Shiel. But don't you think that often girls like that, just by some sort of trick or fluke, persuade a few people they're marvellous, and then after that it goes on for years—I mean, everybody saying they're marvellous—when really they aren't at all? Don't you think so, Peter?

PETER: What?

ANN: Oh—you *are* the limit.

PHILIP CHILHAM, *a thin, pale, weary-looking man in his thirties, appears at the entrance and pauses to light a cigarette.*

PETER (*softly*): Oh—God—here comes the *Daily Gazette*.

Goes off to sit down on chair L. CHILHAM comes up to the two men L.C. The two musicians are still busy with the score.

CHILHAM (*who talks in quick staccato manner, rather American*): If you ask me, there'll be another shuffle in the Cabinet soon.

KATH.: Why?

CHILHAM (*dropping voice*): Bendrex doesn't look as if he'll last much longer. He's old, of course, but he looks a sick man too. Heart, I'd say. (*Pauses.*) Give me a line on Mrs. Amesbury. I hardly know her.

ANN (*impulsively*): She's nice.

CHILHAM (*dryly*): Thanks very much.

KATH. (*rather quickly*): She's been a widow a long time, and then about six years ago she lost her only son, Rupert—he was in the Air Force—a test pilot—and was killed. She's really fond of music, and she tries to help people like my husband in various ways—like—well, to-night, for instance.

CHILHAM (*obviously making mental note*): I get her.

ANN (*brightly*): And I'm Ann Winter, Mr. Chilham. It's an easy name to remember. And I'm here because my mother is an old friend of Mrs. Amesbury's, and I like music too, and—let me see—what am I good at?

PETER (*groaning from his chair*): Making me feel sick.

ANN: Shut up, Peter.

CHILHAM (*smoothly*): I suppose you'd hate to be mentioned in our capitalist rag, Horlett?

PETER: Please yourself.

CHILHAM: You know your friend Fordley's going to write for us?

PETER: I'm not surprised. I always knew it wouldn't take much to buy Fordley—especially after he married that girl.

CHILHAM (*coolly*): Can we print that?

PETER: You daren't.

CHILHAM: You'll find it in my column in the morning.

PETER (*alarmed*): No—you'd better not. Forget it, please, Chilham.

CHILHAM: Right. But next time don't dare us. We've taken a lot of dares on the *Gazette*. We don't run on tram lines like your poor little Red papers.

PETER (*hotly*): No, you go wobbling all over the town, like a damn great carnival wagon with blood on the wheels.

Enter SYBIL LINCHESTER followed by SIR JAMES DIRNIE. She is talking to him in loud, rather insolent tone.

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LADY S.: It's one of those houses that are like film studios. You know, they photograph you all the time. You haven't time really to *do* anything—only to look as if you're doing it—for the photographers. Audrey says whenever she stays there, she always looks under the bed for a cameraman.

They are now in. Seeing her, CHILHAM has detached himself from PETER and moved to her. ANN is talking to PETER. SIR JAMES goes to KATHERINE SHIEL.

SIR J. (*pleasantly*): Let's see—you're Mrs. Shiel, aren't you?

KATH.: Yes—and you're Sir James Dirnic.

LADY S. (*loudly to CHILHAM*): Is it true Verity Astley-Uppingham is still bouncing all round Germany shouting *Heil Hitler* in shorts and showing the storm troopers her very Nordic legs?

KATH.: And I hope you're fond of music.

SIR J.: Some.

CHILHAM (*the knowing one*): It's worse than that, our Berlin man says. You see——

SIR J.: I don't know much about it, but I'm trying. Can't say fairer than that, can I?

LADY S.: Who's doing Mercy Beaufort's publicity now—do you know?

CHILHAM: A boy who's just started. No good.

LADY S.: Definitely lousy.

CHILHAM: She's trying to get it on the cheap.

LADY S.: Mercy always tried to get everything on the cheap. She thinks life's one great bargain basement.

KATH.: No, once he's really started on something, David goes straight on and he's angelic. The difficult time is just before he begins anything—and then he really *is* troublesome. But of course I'm used to it now, and even the children understand they mustn't worry him then.

SIR J.: He's a lucky man.

KATH.: What? You *say* that! He's had an awful struggle, y'know.

SIR J.: What's wrong with a struggle if you've something worth struggling for? I say, he's a lucky man.

LADY S. (*turning*): That sounds all wrong from you, Jimmy. Who's a lucky man?

SIR J.: Shiel.

LADY S. (*looking insolently from SHIEL to KATH.*): Really! (*She*

gives a short ironical laugh.) That's very sweet and modest of you, Jimmy. *(Turns to CHILHAM again.)*

PETER *(suddenly raising his voice, to ANN, and drawing everybody)*: Well, and why not, you goof? I haven't the least objection to destroying everything and starting all over again.

SIR J.: What's all this?

PETER: I'm saying I've no objection to wiping out Homer and Shakespeare and Dante and Michael Angelo and Leonardo and Bach and Mozart and King's College Chapel and Chartres and the Bodleian and the British Museum and the National Gallery—and the whole bag of tricks. Why not? We'd have the fun of doing it all ourselves then. Starting from the very beginning. With a clean slate.

LADY S. *(maliciously)*: I'm glad you said *slate*.

PETER *(suspiciously)*: Why?

LADY S.: It sounds so suitable.

MRS. A. *has now entered up stage of BENDREX, who is carrying a small glass. MRS. A. is bright but anxious.*

MRS. A.: Now, Sybil, you're not to be naughty, and, Peter, you mustn't make so much noise. You're not going to start destroying anything to-night. Now, Charles, you don't know them all yet——

BENDREX: No, but we mustn't hold everything up, my dear May.

MRS. A.: I'll do it quickly. Lady Sybil and Sir James Dirnie you've met already. This is Mrs. Shiel. That's Ann Winter. And that's Peter Horlett, who thinks he's a communist poet.

The two musicians who have been in the recess now come forward a moment.

David Shiel, the composer. And Mr. Lengel, who's kindly playing the violin part for us.

BENDREX *(graciously)*: This is a great pleasure—to hear such an important new work.

SHIEL: It's good of you to come, sir. *(To MRS. A.)* We're ready, if you are.

MRS. A.: Make yourselves comfortable everybody. Charles, will you sit here.

They begin to seat themselves. MRS. A. attends to BENDREX.

BENDREX *(with some difficulty)*: Just a moment, my dear May.

MRS. A.: Of course, Charles. But you're not feeling ill, are you?

BENDREX *(slowly, faintly)*: Not really. But—I have to take—certain precautions.

She holds the glass while BENDREX brings out small box of

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tablets and takes one or two with the water, taking the glass from Mrs. A., then handing it back to her and closing his eyes for a moment while she puts it down. Then he looks rather more alert.

Now for some music. I like music best these days because it's the only art that's really detached. It doesn't lead you back to the newspapers. It doesn't drag in the rest of the world. You can lose yourself in it.

MRS. A.: That makes it all the more dangerous sometimes, Charles. It can break down those careful barriers we build up inside our minds.

BENDREX: Yes, but nobody knows but ourselves.

LADY S.: Thank God for that! It would be pretty awful if other people knew what sometimes happens somewhere inside our heads, when music gets to work on us.

KATH.: Perhaps other people can know.

LADY S.: My dear—absurd!

KATH.: But it may not be happening inside our heads.

DIRNIE: It couldn't be happening anywhere else.

LENGEL (*appearing from recess*): Why not?

SIR J.: Well—ask yourself, my dear fellow. Impressions, thoughts, fancies—if they're not in your head, where are they?

LENGEL: I don't know, and neither do you. We know nothing of any importance about ourselves.

KATH.: But perhaps what we think is happening inside is really happening outside. We may think about life all the wrong way round.

PETER: Now wait a minute, Mrs. Shiel. We know that what we call thought is only a change in the cell structure of the brain—

SHIEL: You call yourself a poet, Horlett—and believe that dreary rubbish.

BENDREX (*half humorously, half wearily*): Gentlemen!—music please, not metaphysics. Fortunately Mrs. Amesbury won't compel us afterwards to describe what happened in what—with all due deference to you, Mrs. Shiel—I shall persist in thinking are our personal secret little worlds.

MRS. A.: If I did, this would probably be the last little musical party you'd all attend here. Now, David.

SHIEL (*to everybody*): You do understand, of course, that this is really a concerto for violin and full orchestra, and that all I can give you is a rough transcription for the piano of the orchestral parts. It's in three movements. And it's not one of those programme works—fate knocking at the door in the first subject, and so on. You can each

make your own story for it, if you must have one. Now for the first movement—*Allegro Capriccioso*.

MRS. A. (*as she goes into recess*): Thank you, David.

Listeners in relaxed attitudes as concerto begins. After music is established MRS. A. rises and as she speaks, music slowly fades out.

Begins quite well. But then David Shiel always did begin his things well. Can he keep it up—that's the question. I do hope he's done something really good this time, and that they'll like it. (*Looks at BENDREX.*) I'm sure *you* could do something for him, Charles, if you really wanted to. You're looking terribly old and tired to-night, Charles. I'm sorry, my dear, really sorry, though I don't mind telling you I'm feeling tired too. It's such a bother being loud and bright all the time, and yet if you're not, people don't seem to listen any more. Everybody just shouts. There's no conversation any more, is there, Charles? It might have been better if you and I were having a cosy little talk about old times, because we shan't have many more little talks. But I wanted to help David Shiel. Perhaps the music will make us feel better. (*Looks at PHILIP CHILHAM.*) You could do something for him too, Philip Chilham; I don't like you very much, and I hate your horrible cheap nasty newspaper—but—well there it is. (*Looks at DIRNIE.*) What about *you*? I don't like you very much, Sir James Very-Rich Dirnie, though of course I don't know you very well, but I suspect you're a bit of a brute. I've only Sybil Linchester's word for it that you like music at all. And you don't look as if you do. And God knows she may have said it just so that you would have to come here with her and be bored all evening. She's quite capable of that (*To SYBIL.*) Yes, you are. And you know it. At any moment you may start yawning or whispering at the top of your voice that you don't like the concerto, just to spoil everything. And I warn you, Sybil, I'll be furious if you do play any of your tricks to-night, and I'll pay you out somehow. So keep that private devil of yours chained up to-night, please. (*Looks at KATHERINE.*) Poor Katherine! Trying so hard not to look anxious. Pretending you don't care about anything now but the music. Hump!

KATH. (*in trance-like tone*): Mrs. Amesbury, whatever happens, we're really grateful.

MRS. A.: I'm glad to do it, my dear. I like you and David, and I also happen to like music.

KATH.: I know you do.

MRS. A.: If I didn't do something of this sort, I'd soon become a useless old thing. If I'm not one already.

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KATH.: You know you're not.

MRS. A.: I believe a lot of people say I'm just an old busybody, trying to make myself important.

KATH.: They've no right to say so.

MRS. A.: Of course I *am* an old busybody, and I do like to say, "Oh he played it for the first time in my studio."

KATH.: Why shouldn't you?

MRS. A.: And I've sometimes caught these musical geniuses of yours giving each other a look and a wink. And I know what they've been thinking. "Better humour the old girl—she might be useful."

KATH.: David doesn't talk about you like that.

MRS. A.: But behind all the busyboding and the boasting and the snobbery and whatever else it may be, there's something real. I do care about music itself. That's real. Sometimes I think it's more real than we are. What are we? We don't know.

KATH.: No, we don't know.

MRS. A.: You're anxious, aren't you, Katherine? Yes, terribly anxious. And I envy you. Just to have something, somebody, once again, to be anxious about.

She sits down, and now KATHERINE comes to life and is urgent.

KATH.: All of you—please, *please*—do listen properly—and then like the concerto, really like it, so that you'll tell everybody about it. (To CHILHAM.) You—Philip Chilham—like it—and tell everybody about it—

CHILHAM (*without expression*): Just what I thought. Old-fashioned stuff so far. Hasn't got the modern tempo. No modern hardness. Steel. Nickel. Chromium plate. Bakelite. Streamlines. Machine guns. Bombing planes—

KATH. (*breaking in impatiently*): Oh you! (*Turning to others.*) This means a lot to us. It isn't money—though that's important.

SIR J. (*grimly*): You surprise me!

KATH.: But David's put himself—the very best of himself—into his work. I know you've all heard that before, but it really means something. You see, he's not just playing—amusing himself, and hoping to amuse you. It's not like that at all.

ANN (*loudly, cheerfully*): He doesn't look a bit like Beethoven to me. Fancy having Beethoven in love with you! Frightening! But he used to pick his teeth with a fork.

KATH.: David's giving himself, every little secret, in this music of his. I used to be jealous sometimes. There seemed so little left for me. Nothing special of my very own. All going into the music.

For everybody. For people who'd say, "Yes, that's all right. Not bad." But now I'm not jealous any more like that. I want him to be happy. If he's happy, then I'll be happy—and of course the children will be happy too—we'll all be happy, all the Shiels. And it hasn't been like that for a long time. David's often so worried and miserable. So many disappointments.

LADY S.: Whose fault is that? (*Slowly, clearly.*)

KATH. (*fiercely*): And if *you* start being a nuisance—spoiling everything for us—I'll—I'll *kill* you.

CHILHAM (*sitting up, distinctly*): What a look! I believe she *hates* Lady Sybil. She could *kill* her. That would make a swell story.

KATH. (*appealingly*): Like the concerto—please—please!

Sits. We now concentrate on CHILHAM.

CHILHAM: A swell story. Lady Sybil Linchester murdered! Good idea for a detective yarn. All the set-up here. I could do it on my head. Mystery story—or a play. Better make it a play. More money in a play. And film rights and everything. Bags of money in a good mystery play. Might work some of it out now with these people and this setting. Let's see. Snoops Linchester is murdered. Who did it? I see the final scene.

He points to the others. All except LADY S., who is supposed to be dead, and ANN, who is not in this scene, sit up sharply, in a strong rather white light. CHILHAM now plays the super-detective, and the others typical characters in an average mystery play. They should all play in a rather heavy conventional theatrical style, though not like old-fashioned melodrama.

CHILHAM (*Contd. As* MORTON FERRET): I have brought you all here again so that we might have a final talk on the murder of Lady Sybil Linchester.

SIR J. (*with heavy stagy tone*): Ah—so the mystery's been too much for the famous Morton Ferret.

CHILHAM: On the contrary, Sir James——

SIR. J.: You mean——?

CHILHAM: I mean, I have solved the mystery.

General cries of astonishment, "What!", "Good God!" etc.

SIR J.: Then where is the murderer?

CHILHAM: The murderer—my dear Sir James—is here.

More "What!" and a cry from KATH., who collapses.

PETER: She's fainted.

KATH. (*in faint tones*): No. I'm—all right.

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CHILHAM (*in self-satisfied tone*): It has been a most curious and complicated case. I soon discovered that with one exception you all had a strong motive for killing Lady Sybil. The exception was Mrs. Amesbury. But—with one exception—you all had alibis. Again, the exception was Mrs. Amesbury, who admitted that she could have committed the murder. But of course she had no motive. It did not take me very long to establish that your various alibis were false, although very ingenious. You, Mr. Bendrex, could have left—and *did leave*—that train at Surbiton. The figure your butler saw in your library, Sir James, was a dummy. Horlett, you *were* at the dance, as your friends testified, but you were not there *all the time*. The only alibi that I couldn't break down was—(*turning to KATH.*)—yours. Yes, Mrs. Shiel's alibi was apparently perfect. Yet I know that Mrs. Shiel came here——

A gasp of astonishment. KATH. gives a little cry.

Well?

KATH.: All right. You've won. I'll confess. I came here and saw her—she was asleep—and I thought of all the horrible mischief she'd made—something snapped in my brain—I killed her.

CHILHAM: Thank you, Mrs. Shiel. Only—you see—you *didn't* kill her!

SIR J.: *What!*

KATH.: But—that's impossible—I know I did.

CHILHAM: You couldn't have killed her. You see, when you came here, Lady Sybil *was dead*. She had been dead for at least two hours. (*Very gently.*) Mrs. Amesbury, you must have had a very strong motive. What was it?

Mrs. A.: She had deliberately wrecked my boy's life. I had waited for years for a chance to avenge him. And then at last it came. I have no regrets.

She pretends to take poison from a little bottle and falls back dead.

BENDREX: Why—she's——

CHILHAM (*in self-satisfied tone*): Yes, I thought that would happen. Well, that completes the Case of the Four Alibis.

SIR J. (*in stogy tone*): God!—Ferret—they were right—you *are* a wizard.

CHILHAM (*in self-satisfied tone*): My dear Sir James, merely a matter of adding two and two. And now I'll get back to my bulbs—so much more amusing than human beings. Good night.

Instantly the lights change and all the others go back to their listening attitudes. CHILHAM becomes himself again.

CHILHAM: Yes, I could do it on my head. But after all why should I bother? I'm making plenty of money.

BENDREX (*solemnly*): You can find my salary in Whitaker's Almanac.

CHILHAM: I make more than you do, Bendrex. *And earn it.*

SIR J. (*contemptuously*): Chicken-feed! You've never seen any real money, Chilham.

CHILHAM (*aggressively turning to him*): I don't pretend to make it on your scale, Dirnie. But don't forget I go for nothing to places where you've to pay through the nose. And more people run after me than they do after you.

SIR J.: You should see the size of the people who run after me.

CHILHAM (*passionately, a man convincing himself*): I'm somebody in this town, don't forget it. And ten years ago nobody had heard of me.

PETER (*scornfully*): And in another ten nobody'll hear of you.

CHILHAM (*same tone as before*): That's not true—unless I'm dead and done with by then. And if I am, well that'll be that. I'll have had my fun.

KATH. (*calmly*): I wonder.

CHILHAM (*annoyed*): You've no need to wonder. I tell you, if some of you had my life for a month, you'd have to go into a nursing home.

KATH.: So much fun?

CHILHAM (*annoyed*): Yes, yes, yes. But it's got pace, real tempo, my life has. I don't just exist, I *live*.

KATH.: I wonder.

CHILHAM (*irritably*): I know what I'm talking about. If your husband made what I do and had the pull I have in this town, you wouldn't know yourself.

MRS. A. (*calmly*): She likes knowing herself.

CHILHAM (*irritably*): You took damn good care to get me here, didn't you, hoping for a little publicity. You're not honest, you people, that's your trouble. Envy me really, only you won't admit it. Oh—to hell!

Stalks back to his chair, and resumes listening attitude. ANN WINTER now trips forward, wearing nothing but a bright South Sea Pareu and a wreath of white flowers. Downstage light should be very bright for this episode.

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ANN (*brightly, moving about*): Well, here I am on my South Sea Island again.

To others.

And there you all sit, looking so dull, not having any fun at all—stupid, stupid, *stupid*. Yes, even you, Peter. (*Turns away from them.*) It's a lovely little South Sea Island. Out there's the lagoon—bright, bright blue—and full of rainbow-coloured tiny fishes. Here are palm trees, of course—and lots of flowers—magnolia and hibiscus and—and—things. Here—all lovely clean sand. The sun shining—or a big moon, just as you like. Nobody to worry me. Nobody saying, "Ann darling, you really shouldn't, you know." No, none of that nonsense. The beautiful white queen of the island.

Turns, calling sharply.

Mr. Chilham!

CHILHAM (*in trance style*): Yes?

ANN (*settling herself down*): You must write in your column about me on my island. Miss Ann Winter on her beautiful little South Sea Island.

CHILHAM: Okay. Is the island yours, Miss Winter?

ANN (*proudly*): It wasn't originally, but now I'm queen of it.

CHILHAM: And a very popular queen too, I imagine.

ANN: You are quite right, Mr. Chilham. I *am* a popular queen, the *most* popular queen the island has ever had. As soon as I arrive, —because I'm not here all the time, you know, sometimes I'm staying with my mother in Knightsbridge—but as soon as I arrive, all the natives hold a week's festival, with processions and speeches and songs and dances and—and—everything, and they all cry, "Hail to our beautiful white queen."

CHILHAM: Does Hollywood know about this, Miss Winter?

ANN: Oh—yes—they're very excited about it in Hollywood, and they've made me a most wonderful offer to act in a film.

CHILHAM: What's the film about?

ANN (*proud but confidential*): Well, you see, in this film Ronald Colman, Clark Gable and Robert Taylor are all madly in love with me, and I have to choose one of them.

CHILHAM: Which do you choose?

ANN (*triumphantly*): That's the point. I don't choose any of them. No, in the end I suddenly tell them I prefer an English boy, not famous at all, though of course he might be at any time—

CHILHAM: Who is this English boy?

ANN: I don't feel I ought to tell you that, Mr. Chilham. But

thank you very much, and please put some very nice photographs in, but don't let my mother give you any of her snapshots of me—they're awful!

Gets up and pirouettes a little, humming, then stops near PETER and points a toe.

Peter, Peter—look—aren't my legs pretty?

SIR J. (*coolly*): Yes.

ANN (*indignantly*): I didn't ask you. You think about your precious Lady Sybil. And she's not so jolly marvellous when you have a good look at her. She's *ancient* really—though not to you, I suppose, because you're ancient too. Peter, Peter—do look at me.

But he doesn't, and she is downcast.

Oh—well—I think you're mean.

DIRNIE yawns loudly. ANN hurries back to her chair, where she must get back into her frock. DIRNIE rises and strolls forward, looking idly about him.

SIR J. (*yawning*): Well, it's all right, I suppose, but it hasn't done anything to me yet, your violin concerto. Nothing's *happening* inside. Not one little window's opened yet. My fault or his? Probably his. No genius. But I dunno—I'm getting stale too. Hell—yes—Jimmy Dirnie, you're getting stale.

Looks at the others.

Don't think much of this lot. Kid's pretty—but insipid—like most of 'em.

ANN (*without moving or being seen*): You liked my legs.

SIR J.: You mustn't attach too much importance to that. Our minds don't run all the time the way you think they do. Young Horlett—communist poet from Oxford. They're three a penny now Parlour pinks.

PETER: Pink yourself! You wait.

SIR J.: I'll have to. All for the people but can't write anything they want to read. Awkward that, Bendrex. Well, you're about through—even if you live much longer. You've wangled through the last twenty years on a nice committee manner and dining out with the right people.

BENDREX (*quietly*): There are worse things, Dirnie, than a nice manner and dining out.

SIR J.: What do you mean?

After pause, much louder.

SIR J. (*Contd.*): What the hell do you mean?

BENDREX (*very quietly*): You know.

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SIR J.: I don't know what you're talking about. Great British Statesman! Saving the Empire! You couldn't save a fish and chip shop, Bendrex. You couldn't save a canary from a cat. And don't try to patronise me again to-night, my Right Honourable Friend, or I'll let you have it where it'll hurt.

BENDREX (*very quietly*): I think—you're too late—I can't—be hurt—much more.

SIR J. (*looking at him, change of tone*): Poor old devil! He's about all in. That's what's waiting for me, and even now, already, everything's getting damned dull——

Yawns and looks at LADY S.

Yes—damned dull—no lights being turned on anywhere inside—no windows being opened—and I'm not forgetting you, Sybil—*Snoops*.

LADY S.: Leave out *Snoops*. I didn't throw that into the bargain. That's not for sale.

SIR J.: I'm glad to know something isn't. Well, I'm sorry to inform you, Lady Sybil, but nothing happens any more when I look at you.

LADY S.: My God! I've been screaming with boredom at you for months and months.

He ignores this and looks at KATH.

SIR J. (*slowly*): Mrs. Shiel. Sensible woman. Nice woman. Loves her husband, makes a home, produces children. Dull probably, but—I wonder what that would have been like. I wonder . . .

He moves downstage as he repeats this slowly, and the lights are thrown where he stands. KATH. now comes forward to him.

KATH.: Well, Jim!

She kisses him lightly, then brushes something off his lapel.

Have a nice trip?

SIR J. (*rather awkwardly*): Why—yes—pretty good.

KATH. (*in a very wifely style*): The children have been worrying these last three days about when you were coming home. "When is Daddy coming back?" they kept asking, the little stupid. Richard fell rather badly yesterday—cut his knee—but Nanny and I cleaned the cut very carefully and put a big bandage on—and he's tremendously proud of his bandage. Marjorie wanted one too. Jim, we'll really have to have poor Marjorie's eyes tested. I was talking to Nanny about it this afternoon, and she's certain there's something wrong——

SIR J.: Not seriously wrong?

KATH.: No, of course not, but she might have to wear glasses for a year or two.

SIR J.: She won't like that.

KATH.: That's all you know. She'll love it. They always do, if you tell them that glasses are rather special. You'll see.

SIR J.: What's happening to-night—anything?

KATH.: No, my pet. The Forbes rang up, but I said I knew you'd want a quiet evening at home to-night. That's all right, isn't it?

SIR J. (*a shade doubtfully*): Yes, of course.

LADY S.: And there'd be an awful lot of those quiet evenings—little chats about the brats—and a soprano or two on the wireless.

KATH. (*brightly*): I'll run up to the nursery and tell them you're coming in to see them.

She hurries back to her seat. LADY S. comes downstage.

LADY S. (*in a trance tone*): Well, that wasn't so very wonderful either, was it?

SIR J. (*slowly*): I don't know.

LADY S.: Come on, Jimmy, be honest. That's one thing you can be. You don't usually deceive yourself.

SIR J. (*slowly*): It came too quickly, you see. We hadn't built up to it together. That must make a difference.

LADY S.: Oh, don't talk like a fool—that kind of woman and that kind of life would start you drinking yourself to death within six months. Do you think I don't know you?

SIR J.: I'm sure you don't. Never even expected you to know me.

LADY S.: You're not going to pretend now you haven't been pretty sentimental at times with me, Jimmy?

SIR J.: No, I expect I have. But I think I was talking to myself really, not to you. I was feeling mellow. I'd got what I wanted.

LADY S.: Me.

SIR J. (*slowly*): No, not really you. Less than you, and yet at the same time a lot more than you. I'd been conquering your famous old family and that famous old mansion and that miles of park with the high wall round and the footmen and gardeners and game-keepers and all the people you see in carriages and big cars and in the stalls of theatres when you're a poor little devil in the gallery and Mayfair and the House of Lords and Ascot and Cowes. I'd been taken to bed by the whole lot.

LADY S.: In short, the good old inferiority complex having a romp.

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SIR J.: Well, you can't grumble. You've done pretty well out of it. You've cost me fifty thousand if you cost me a penny.

LADY S.: And if I could have worked it, that fifty thousand would have been five hundred thousand. And I'd show you the door five minutes after you'd written your last possible cheque. And—my dear Sir James—if I'd thought you'd gone out to make a pound or two hawking coal or bananas in the street—in other words, if you'd been compelled to go back to where you first started from—I'd have been delighted. What do you think of that?

SIR J.: Doesn't surprise me at all, Sybil. I'm not sure I haven't enjoyed our tussles over the cheque book more than anything else.

LADY S. (*coming to life*): That's lucky, because they lasted longer. And now I'll show you something—and your nice dull friend Mrs. Shiel too.

DIRNIE steps back towards his seat.

Five years ago. No, six. But only six. There'd been a charity concert at the Albert Hall, but this was a few hours after it had finished. You see, a new short work for the orchestra had been included in the programme and had been conducted by the composer—Mr. David Shiel—

She says this almost as if she were announcing him, and now he enters quickly R. He looks rather younger now, is in full evening dress, but rather untidy, and is at once excited and rather drunk.

David? I thought you weren't going to see me again.

SHIEL: I wasn't.

LADY S. (*mockingly*): And now——?

SHIEL: Yes, I'm here. I couldn't keep away.

LADY S.: Isn't your wife waiting up for you somewhere?

SHIEL (*excitedly, bitterly*): Yes, yes. This is an important night for us, a new work being played for the first time. We went out to supper, I left them. I said I had to see Duplet from Geneva.

LADY S.: And I'm Duplet from Geneva?

SHIEL (*bitterly*): Yes, I'm having a very important talk with him about a performance of my symphony there. So of course that must come before everything. Only reasonable, isn't it?

LADY S.: My dear David, this mood of self-reproach—you're not tight, by any chance, are you?

SHIEL: Yes.

LADY S. (*lightly*): Thought so. But this self-reproach isn't very complimentary to me, you know. If that's how you're feeling, hadn't you better hurry back and do your little duty.

SHIEL (*eagerly now*): I couldn't keep away. All night I was thinking about you, Sybil. I tried not to, but it was no use. Did you like the work?

LADY S.: Yes, lovely—David.

SHIEL: Do you mean that or is it just politeness?

LADY S.: My dear, I'm the rudest woman in London.

SHIEL (*eagerly*): When you were listening, were you thinking about me, remembering what I'd said to you, what had happened between us?

LADY S.: The whole time.

SHIEL (*rather savagely*): My God—I never know whether you mean a single thing you say, Sybil. I'll admit it, I can't make head or tail of you. And I'm not trying to flatter you. I don't think it is flattering. I hate it. Sometimes I hate *you*. But I can't keep away. Sybil—

He tries to take her in his arms but she fends him off.

LADY S. (*coolly*): I may be a nuisance, a liar, and a cheat, but—please—may you make love to me—humph?

He looks sullen and does not reply.

Don't be sulky, David. That's it, isn't it?

SHIEL: And what if it is? If my arms are round you and I'm kissing you, then you're really there and I can forget the ache and the torment for a few minutes.

LADY S.: Aches and torments? You're not just dramatising everything, are you?

SHIEL (*after a pause, slowly, miserably*): Over and over again Sybil, I've wished that I'd never exchanged a look or a word with you, that I'd run for miles that night down at the Abingtons instead of going to your room, that I'd—

LADY S. (*cutting in sharply*): Yes, you needn't enlarge on it. And I wish I felt flattered by being regarded as a *femme fatale*, but the truth is, I find it rather ridiculous that you should come here, not very sober, in the middle of the night, to assure me you wish to God you could be anywhere else—

SHIEL (*urgently*): No, no, no, you know what I mean.

LADY S.: I think you'd better go.

SHIEL (*distressed*): No—for God's sake, Sybil, let me stay now, please—please. You don't know the state of mind I've been in. Forget everything I said. I don't know what I'm saying. I'm bewitched Sybil. Look—look at me—

He has fallen on his knees in front of her and has taken her

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hands and is kissing them, a miserable distraught man. CHILHAM now strolls into the scene.

LADY S.: And there he was, you see, Philip, going on like a mad-man. I was irritated, but I was sorry for him too. I'm sorry for anybody who's compelled to behave like that. Love's just not worth it.

CHILHAM (*unreal tone*): I agree. What happened next?

LADY S. (*to SHIEL*): I'm sorry, David, but I really think you're becoming a bore.

Gives him a hand to rise. He rises slowly and stares at her.

Now don't start being tragic—and please remember, anyhow, you're tight.

He still stares at her.

And if you hurried, you might still catch that conductor from Geneva, Monsieur Duplet. A sensible chat about music instead of making an absurd scene here.

SHIEL (*very bitterly*): Go to hell!

He hurries out R. She turns to CHILHAM.

LADY S. (*as if being interviewed*): And that was that. And believe it or not, I was really being rather kind to him. But of course, he was never my sort.

CHILHAM: Right. You like 'em tougher than that.

LADY S. (*firmly*): Tougher and much, much richer.

Sits down on pouffe.

CHILHAM: Of course.

Taking interviewer's tone.

Now then, Lady Sybil, you're recognised as being at the head of your profession——

LADY S. (*graciously*): Sit down, Mr. Chilham, won't you? Yes, I think I may say that I'm one of the most successful kept women in London.

CHILHAM (*politely*): Which means now, in the world.

LADY S.: Possibly, I don't know. I've travelled a good deal, of course, and have many friends abroad, but—well—give me a good clean-living Englishman.

CHILHAM (*makes a note of this*): Swell! Now I know that our feminine readers would like your views on what a girl's chances are nowadays in your profession. Can the modern business girl succeed as a kept woman, or is the competition of society and the stage too

keen? Is there still plenty of room at the top? Is the life as easy as it's imagined to be?

LADY S. (*promptly*): Certainly not. A girl who merely wants an easy life should keep away. To succeed she will have to have determination, courage, perseverance, foresight, and a cast-iron personal charm.

CHILHAM: *Thank you. Now—*

But they are interrupted. PETER has risen, wearing a Red Army general's cap, and now strides forward. He is followed by ANN, not as herself but as an aide.

PETER (*harshly*): Quiet!

LADY S. (*surprised*): What?

PETER (*very harshly*): I said—*Quiet!*

ANN: What must be done with these two, General?

PETER (*considering them*): The woman can do the washing-up in the lorry drivers' canteen—

LADY S. (*ungrily*): I won't go.

PETER (*thundering*): Then you'll be sent to the Farm of Correction. Which do you prefer?

To CHILHAM.

Let's see, you were a journalist, weren't you?

CHILHAM (*eagerly*): Yes, general, my column in the *Daily Gazette*, you remember, was—

PETER (*cutting in sharply*): Report at the Sewage Works. (*To ANN.*) Send 'em off.

ANN leads them out of scene and they sit down. ANN comes to PETER again.

ANN: The Concrete-Mixers' League of Marxist Youth is waiting to hear your poem, General.

PETER: I'll be ready in a minute.

Waves her away and she returns to her seat. He paces up and down, after taking off his hat, worried about his poem.

Damned if it's right yet, though it's good enough for the Concrete Mixers. (*Begins reciting.*)

You, my comrades, iron steps over the mountain, steel turrets
And Pylons for the power line, cables crossing the ice,

The electrified wire round the prison camp of decay and death . . .
That's not so good—"the electrified wire—round the prison camp."
Cut it out, I think. Must get the end right, though. As long as

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that's all right, all the middle part doesn't matter—not for this lot,
Let's see——

He recites with feeling.

These also salute you:

The night mail flying blind among the mountains;

The diver groping over the hulks; the iceberg

Defying the Gulf Stream; a seagull in Regent's Park;

All men building bridges, all good guys in blue jeans

Lowered five hundred feet down the face of the great Dam:

Amazon salutes you, and Everest, and the Northern Lights,

And diamond constellations that will not let the spaces

Cover and hide them: these too salute you.

The flags are dipping.

The guns shake the air.

Now, lift in return, comrades,

The Clenched Fist.

Shouts this last phrase, lifting his clenched fist.

ANN (without moving, calling): Ready, General.

PETER (shouting, as he faces imaginary entrance to big meeting):
Ready!

Walks forward impressively, as if into meeting, but actually returns to seat. All the other characters except BENDREX applaud heartily and this applause can be supplemented offstage. BENDREX, now with light on him, should rise, in the manner of a popular political after-dinner speaker. Clapping ceases.

BENDREX (in manner of such a speaker): Mr. Chairman, Your Royal Highness, Your Excellencies, My Lords, ladies and gentlemen: I thank you for the gracious manner in which you have proposed and received this toast. I stand here, as the representative of His Majesty's Government, an unworthy representative, no doubt, but at this moment a grateful one. And, may I add, a sincere one. I believe that the Government in which I have long had the honour to serve truly reflects the mind and the will of the English People. It is, in truth, *your* Government. You do not know, you cannot understand, what is happening in the world. The Government does not know and cannot understand what is happening in the world. Speaking for myself—and after all I have been in office, except for a few short periods, for over twenty years—I have not the least comprehension of what anything means anywhere any more. The last time I made any sense at all out of the world was in July nineteen-fourteen. Since then I have not been able to make head or tail of anything that has happened three miles from Westminster. I might be

compared to the driver of a large fast vehicle who, unknown to his passengers, who are busy reading the cricket news, has become paralysed and has lost most of his eye-sight. Ironically enough—and nobody can say I have not always appreciated irony—it is more than likely that I shall be dead before the inevitable crash occurs. But, ladies and gentlemen, if you will kindly remember that you too are among those passengers, and will reflect upon your unenviable situation, you can entertain yourselves throughout the other speeches, which I have no doubt will be even drearier than mine—although the worst of them will be good enough for such an assembly of greedy, guzzling, complacent half-wits as I see before me to-night—

After "half-wits" there are cries of "Shame" and "Order" and "Sit down" from the other characters. He manages to shout the concluding words above this noise, but has to sit down. The light on him now fades. The music comes through, the concluding bars of the movement being heard. All the characters are listening quietly. When the music stops all of them except BENDREX, who should seem very tired, move a little in their chairs, as people always do, as they murmur to each other "Quite good" and "Not bad" and "Nice opening movement", "Excellent", and so on.

MRS. A. (*going to lights, and switching on, rather loud*): Cigarettes on there, if anybody wants them. Katherine—very good first movement.

Calling to recess.

Delightful, David, quite delightful.

As soon as she has said this, still standing near lights, the curtain is down.

ACT II

Stage exactly as we left it at end of Act One, and MRS. A. is just speaking her last line again.

MRS. A. (*calling*): Delightful, David, quite delightful.

SHIEL (*calling from recess*): Thank you, Mrs. Amesbury.

MRS. A. (*to DIRNIE*): Didn't you think so, Sir James—a very delightful first movement?

SIR J.: Oh—yes. Most interesting—*most* interesting. Kept me interested all the time.

LADY S. (*impudently to KATH.*): You know, Mrs. Shiel, I remember now—I heard one of your husband's orchestral works once before—several years ago.

KATH. (*steadily, knowing what is implied*): Yes, I'm sure you must have done.

SHIEL and LENGEL *appear at edge of recess.*

LADY S. (*to SHIEL*): I was just saying to your wife, I distinctly remember now hearing one of your orchestral works—several years ago—

SHIEL (*coolly*): Did you? Well, they *are* played now and then, y'know.

CHILHAM: Tell me, Shiel, do you consider yourself a modern?

SHIEL: What's the answer to that, Nick?

LENGEL (*with a touch of sarcasm*): Oh—I think he's about as modern as the *Daily Gazette*, Mr. Chilham. He's alive and kicking, you know.

CHILHAM: So are we, so are we.

PETER (*who has been talking to ANN*): Oh—a lot of fellows are in the movement because they've got large romantic ideas of what it'll turn them into.

LADY S. (*as if continuing a conversation*): And what do you want then, Mr. Lengel?

LENGEL: Nothing. No, that is not true. The violin occasionally. A bottle of *Montrachet* of a good year. And a little sleep after lunch. That is all.

SIR J. (*heavily*): Wouldn't suit me. Always made my way by my own efforts, and want to keep on making it.

MRS. A. (*who has been saying something to BENDREX*): Are you sure you're all right, Charles?

BENDREX (*who isn't*): Yes, my dear May. Don't worry . . . a little tired, that's all.

MRS. A.: We'd better not wait too long then. Now, David?

SHIEL (*telling them all*): Now for the second movement, then. *Adagio*. Still no story for you, as before. You'll have to make your own. But—(*lightly*)—being an *adagio* movement, of course it's all rather sad.

MRS. A. *has gone to the light switch on her previous speech and now switches off, as SHIEL and LENGEL go into recess, and she returns to her chair and settles down with the others. Music begins and they listen in silence for several bars. When MRS. A. speaks music fades out, but fades in again towards end of her speech, and fades during beginning of next, and so on. Music should come in and out frequently during this act.*

MRS. A. (*without moving, very quietly*): Years ago, when Rupert was about five, we used to go in Spring and stay in a little village in Hereford, not far from the Welsh border, and there it was all white with apple blossom, and when the wind blew through the orchards it would snow apple blossom, and little Rupert, who was a lovely happy child, would run among the trees and sometimes hide and then come dancing out, and laugh as the white petals were shaken down . . . a little boy . . . in an orchard . . . years ago . . . I've been back since, but it isn't the same . . . there doesn't seem as much apple blossom now . . . it's changed . . . it's changed . . .

SIR J. (*same manner as above*): When I was a kid, my old dad would sometimes take me with him for a bit o' fishing Saturday afternoons or Sunday mornings up in one o' the becks where they said you might find a trout. Dad didn't know much about it, but he was always hopeful, and so was I, of course, being only a kid. And I'd go wading downstream, ducking under branches and standing on stone in the water and feeling the mossy stuff between my toes and putting foxgloves on my finger and lying on the bank watching the stream wink at me and then falling asleep till Dad would shake me and we'd walk back to the tram and I'd feel as if I'd been away from the streets and houses and mills for years . . . I'd got clean out of it . . . I can't get out of it like that any more . . . I've tried all sorts of places . . . fairly thrown money away . . . but it can't be done . . . funny, but it can't . . . you're fixed . . . you're fixed . . .

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LADY S. (*same manner*): When I went to California four years ago with the Shirley-Wilsons, we made a trip into the Painted Desert and the Navajo Indian Reservation in Northern Arizona. The sky was pure turquoise and the colossal sandstone cliffs were like burnished copper, and it was all far away, far away, and very peaceful. The Navajo Indians have song-prayers and they used to invoke the Four Winds—the Black Wind, the Blue Wind, the Yellow Wind and the Iridescent Wind—and they used to cry “That it may be peaceful before me, That it may be peaceful behind me. All is peace, all is peace.” And nobody understood or believed me when I said that I wished that I’d been born a Navajo woman . . . to wander with my sheep in those lost canyons . . . under a burning empty sky . . . crying to the Blue and Yellow Winds . . . they wouldn’t believe me . . . yet it was true . . . it was true . . .

A pause.

PETER: It’s all wrong. We sit here listening to sweet slow music, thinking nice sweet slow wistful thoughts, simply because our bellies are full, we’re warm and comfortable, and in an hour or two we can trot off to a good bed. To hell with sweet slow movements! To hell with wistful little thoughts! To hell with bourgeois sentimental self-indulgence! We ought to be hard—hard as steel—*until the last wrong’s righted.*

KATH. (*wonderingly*): He wants a world without tenderness.

PETER: Things like tenderness in the world as it is are just like bait on a hook, the soft juicy worm with the cruel steel barb hidden inside it.

KATH.: We have not enough tenderness, not too much.

PETER: Go on being tender while the possessing classes go on being tough, and all you’ll get is still more misery in the world. That’s why they encourage you to be soft. Be hard, and then you’re dangerous.

KATH.: But if the people merely become hard, and take the power into their hands and have their revenge for what they have suffered, then there will still be injustice and suffering and misery in the world, and nothing will have been really changed, for the world will still be the same kind of world.

PETER (*jeering*): I know. Let’s have a nice change of heart all round. (*He sits.*)

KATH.: More tenderness. More people listening to slow movements and being deeply stirred by music.

PETER: That’s not going to stop a machine-gun.

KATH.: It would do more than that, it would make machine-guns useless.

The music comes in again, and as they listen without moving, LENGEL enters, without his violin, and the light follows him as he moves restlessly round, an unhappy man.

LENGEL (*slowly, bitterly*): I will tell you something, my friends. All that makes life worth living is magic, any kind of magic, and if you no longer feel that magic is at work, bringing you miracles, then really you are dead. Except during perhaps ten or twelve bars of great music and for a minute when I am half drunk and do not realise I am half drunk, there is no more magic for me, and so I am dead and have been dead for years. (*To LADY S. closely, confidentially.*) Yes, lady, dead, and you cannot bring me back to life, though I saw a look in your eye when you asked me what I wanted that told me you would not mind trying. I am sorry. You are ten years too late. (*Going across to ANN.*) You are very sweet, my child, and I will play so cunningly now that you will have to open wide your heart to yourself and be your own confessor. That may prove a little magic for you. But not for me, not for me. (*Turning to BENDREX, whispering.*) Sir, I think you are right. The very roses are not as red as they used to be. (*To KATH.*) Ah, Katherine, you were magic once for me, do you remember? Then I began to make such a nuisance of myself that I had to go away and fiddle at the other side of the globe. And all the time you loved David so dearly. Once I thought, all this love, a senseless cruel thing, but I did not know then what the face of the world looked like without it, what a vast weary face it wears—(*turning quickly to DIRNIE*)—a face rather like yours, you dull rich fool, rather like yours. And now its reflection fills my sky, and not four times a year do I see the sun, moon and stars. (*Angrily to them all.*) You sit there like lumps of clay. By God, I'll fiddle the dead out of their graves—the dead men and women, the great hours that are dead but once were alive—and full of magic. Look out, you clods, the earth's stirring—

Goes into recess. SHIEL's voice, sounding young and gay, is now heard calling, as if from bottom of stairs.

SHIEL (*off, but approaching*): Katherine! Katherine!

KATH. *now comes sharply to life, sitting up expectantly.*

KATH. (*not answering him, for herself*): David.

SHIEL (*off, but nearer*): Kath—er—ine!

KATH. (*rising, and answering now*): David, I'm here. What's happened? Hurry up!

She is all eagerness. SHIEL, singing cheerfully, now bursts in,

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dressed in tweed coat and flannel trousers, rather untidy, and a much younger and happier man than we have seen before.

SHIEL (*excitedly*): Katie—it's all right.

Kisses her, then twirls her round, chanting.

It's all right, it's all right, it's all right.

KATH. (*happily, breathlessly*): Stop it, idiot. What happened?

SHIEL (*releasing her*): You and I are going to live on top of a hill in Shropshire—a Shropshire lad and lass, in fact—and there I am going to compose *ein Meisterstück, ein Meisterwerk*—a bloomin' masterpiece, kid——

KATH. (*excitedly*): They've commissioned it!

SHIEL: They have, and I'm getting a hundred and fifty pounds *certain*—and Mac's letting us have his cottage in Shropshire for three months and all I have to pay him is one pound per week.

KATH. (*gasping*): But—David—that's marvellous!

DAVID (*boyishly chanting*): *Wundersam und Wunderschön und Wundervoll!* Honestly, Katie, all the way back I've been touching wood and crossing my fingers and dodging away from ladders.

KATH.: I should think so. When do we start?

DAVID (*thundering*): To-morrow, woman, to-morrow!

KATH.: David, we *can't possibly*!

DAVID: To-morrow as ever was.

KATH.: Darling, it simply can't be done.

DAVID: Have I to take some other woman, then?

KATH.: I'd kill her.

DAVID: Then to-morrow it'll have to be.

KATH.: I'll have to stay up half the night, there's so much to do.

DAVID: I've known you stay up half the night when——

KATH.: I haven't time to listen to your foul remarks.

DAVID: There was nothing foul——

KATH.: Millions of things to do.

DAVID (*with mock solemnity*): And you know what the first is.

KATH. (*caught*): What?

He holds out his arms.

Idiot!

But she goes and kisses him, then stays within his embrace, solemnly.

We're awfully lucky, y'know, David. I wonder if you realise how lucky we are.

DAVID: Of course I do.

The light begins to fade. Gently he releases her, steps back a pace, but stares at her.

But why are you crying?

KATH. (*urgently*): Oh—David—David——

DAVID (*who has stepped further back in the dim light and can hardly be seen. In far away voice*): Why are you crying? (*Still further away.*)

Why are you crying?

KATH. (*in terrible alarm*): David, David, come back. Everything—come back.

She drops down, sobbing quietly. The music comes in softly. The speeches that follow can come through it, but now KATHERINE stops sobbing but remains seated in the same attitude in front of the others.

SIR J. (*seated but looking towards audience, quietly*): I don't understand why the music should be so sad. I don't understand this elaborate sadness. I believe it's a kind of affectation, like finger bowls after dinner or going to dance in white kid gloves and that sort of nonsense. What really gets a fellow down is staleness, feeling weary and half-dead. I suppose you can't get that into music, but that's the real thing. Staleness. Feeling that nothing's worth the bloody great effort you have to make. I'm stale half the time nowadays. But not sad—no—that's all my eye.

LADY S.: You are sad after you have made love.

SIR J.: No. But I know what you mean. And I'll tell you what that is, now. It's a feeling I have there's a catch in this love-making business. It's like a lot of other things—it's a let-down. There's something about a good-looking woman that makes you feel, if she'll treat you right, that at last you'll get clean out of yourself, like a door suddenly opening into another sort of life. But—afterwards—you see that it hasn't worked—it's just another let-down. Nearly everything's a let-down.

PETER (*calmly but forcibly*): That's your conscience—you old crook!

BENDREX: I once examined the works of Marx and Engels but couldn't find in them any suggestion that Man has a *conscience*. How does matter in motion develop conscience?

The light is now focused on BENDREX. BENDREX now rises slowly, and has behind his back a straw hat. The music can still be playing, very softly.

I remember Ernest Newman saying that a beautiful slow movement

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of Brückner's—and also, I think, the Elgar 'cello concerto—were really the final bitter-sweet laments for a dying epoch, the swan-song of a civilisation. All slow sad music seems that to me. It has done these many years. The world I knew, the world worth living in, vanished in 1914, and since then we've all existed in a series of vast mad-houses, shrieking with hate and violence, stinking of death. (*Listens a moment, then solemnly.*) This music is an elegy for the "boater"—(*produces it, and regards it affectionately*)—the dear old straw hat.

Puts it on and lights a cigarette or cheroot. He must now be fairly downstage. The light should now suggest strong morning sunlight.

From Straw Hat to Steel Helmet—or the Return of the Dark Ages. We ought to have realised that the world that could banish such a frail, charming, useless piece of headgear was done for. This was the straw that ought to have shown us which way the wind was blowing. (*Sighs.*) Well, we were civilised and happy once . . .

PETER: A few of you—the lucky ones.

BENDREX (*without turning to him*): Better a few than none at all.

Enter L.—PARKS, typical elderly manservant of Edwardian country house.

Ah!—good morning, Parks.

PARKS: Good morning, sir. And a very nice morning too, sir.

BENDREX: Beautiful! Where is everybody?

PARKS (*slowly*): Well, sir—her Grace and most of the ladies and the Colonel have gone to Church. His Lordship and Captain George and the other gentlemen are down at the stables. Mr. Balfour and the young gentleman from Cambridge—Mr. Wilding—are down on the tennis court, Mr. Barrie is in the library—writing—

BENDREX: Good! Have you any idea what Mr. Barrie is writing, Parks?

PARKS (*with a tiny grin*): A piece about a member of Parliament, he said, Mr. Bendrex. Something about what women know, he told me. He's a very affable little gentleman, Mr. Barrie is, sir.

BENDREX: Very. And if he comes out of the library, tell him he'll find me in the Italian Garden.

PARKS: Yes, sir. Would you like the papers, sir?

BENDREX (*taking off the hat, slowly*): No, Parks, not this morning. (*Pauses.*) Let me see, Parks, it was in 1913—rather suddenly too, wasn't it—that you died?

PARKS: Yes, sir. I was taken bad two days after Ascot—one o' them meat pies, I always say.

BENDREX: I think you were lucky, Parks. You died quickly and in your own world. I have been dying for twenty-five years—in a world I no longer understand. I'm puzzled. I'm sad. I'm afraid . . . (*Gives him the straw hat.*) No, I shan't want it.

PARKS: Nothing else I can do, sir?

BENDREX (*sadly*): Not just now, thank you, Parks.

PARKS *goes out L.*

May!

MRS. A.: Are you all right, Charles?

BENDREX: No, my dear. I'm not. But don't worry. (*Looks at her affectionately.*) I still think of you as a young thing, May.

MRS. A.: I'm not. I'm old too—and tired, Charles. And now I feel rather guilty because I insisted upon your coming here to-night. Don't bother about the music——

BENDREX (*gently*): I like the music.

MRS. A. (*touching his arm*): Rest and be quiet.

BENDREX *goes back to his chair.* MRS. A. *watches him a moment, then sits down in front of others. Then she calls quietly.*

Rupert! Rupert!

RUPERT AMESBURY, *an attractive young man in the uniform of an Air Force pilot of several years ago, appears at entrance L. He wears no hat, looks rather untidy, and is very pale.*

RUPERT (*quietly*): Yes, Mother?

She smiles and holds out her hands. He comes forward slowly, with a slightly stiff walk, and takes an affectionate position by her side, with his arm round her.

Why do you bother about these parties, Mother? They're only a worry and a responsibility, and you're tired out half the time. Why don't you just chuck them?

MRS. A.: It's something to do. It keeps me going.

RUPERT: Is it worth it? You know what some of these blighters say?

MRS. A.: Yes, darling. They say I'm a silly old busybody who wants to keep herself in with the musical crowd and pretends to be important when she must know very well she isn't. Umm?

RUPERT: That's about it, and why you spend time and energy and money on 'em I can't imagine.

MRS. A.: If you were still with me, I probably wouldn't.

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RUPERT (*disgustedly*): Snoops Linechester—my hat!

MRS. A.: I know, Rupert—though I don't believe she's as bad as so many people make out. She's always attracted attention—and men always find her attractive—and so the others are jealous—you know—

RUPERT: Is that Tippy Horlett's kid brother?

MRS. A.: Yes—Peter. He's a clever boy—though I can't say I understand the poetry he writes—and he does talk a lot of wild nonsense sometimes—but he's all right really, Rupert.

RUPERT: They're not worth it, Mother. Drop the whole game. Take it easy.

MRS. A.: I may have to soon whether I want to or not. But while I can at all, I must make an effort—and keep going—keep going . . .

RUPERT (*with increasing agitation*): Keep going—keep going—keep going—

Airplane engine noise now comes in. He shouts above it.

Keep her going, you bloody fool! That strut's gone! Bank her, bank her!

MRS. A. (*with terrified loud tone*): Rupert! Rupert!

He is oblivious of her. The stage is rapidly darkening. The engine noise is louder and with it is a roar of wind.

RUPERT (*shouting at top of his voice*): For Christ's sake—hold her now! Hold her! Hold her! No, no, she's not taking it. (*In a final scream.*) Look out!

The airplane and wind noises increase again. There is a shouting from all the characters and people. Then a terrific crash, and a complete black-out on the stage. In the silence that follows Mrs. AMESBURY can be heard sobbing, but as she does this she must make her way back to her chair, so that she is seated listening with the others when lights go up. Music could be faded in here for a while. ANN now rises and comes forward.

ANN (*imperiously*): Peter!

PETER comes forward.

ANN stands before him in a "take me" attitude.

Peter—look at me.

PETER (*after doing so*): Very attractive young woman, Ann.

ANN: I don't know about the attractive part—though I have an idea you're right, Mr. Horlett—but *young woman* is true. And—(*with quick change of tone*)—you remember when you first came to stay with us, and we still had the house in Dorset? I was fifteen then. Geoffrey—I suppose because he was my brother and five years

older—was my hero. And you were Geoffrey's hero. That didn't make me jealous. It turned you into a sort of super-de-luxe hero—

PETER: My hat!

ANN: Then afterwards when I went to France, you faded out a bit—but then, a year ago, it all came back—different, of course—I'd grown up and you didn't seem quite so super-de-luxe—but, you see, by then I knew I'd fallen in love with you Peter—and—no, listen—that I'd never be in love with anybody else—

PETER: Sorry, but that's nonsense, Ann. You'll be falling in love with dozens of fellows before you've finished.

ANN (*gravely*): No, I shan't.

PETER: How d'you know?

ANN: I just do.

PETER: That's silly.

ANN: It may seem so to you, but it wouldn't to a girl. She'd understand. You really do know. It's something you feel—deep inside you. And—Peter—if you didn't want to be married—if you don't believe in marriage—(*nervously but bravely*)—that wouldn't matter—I mean—I'd come to you—without being married—or do—whatever you liked—

PETER (*rather gruffly*): No . . . no . . . no . . .

He turns away and moves restlessly.

ANN: Listen, Peter—please!

PETER (*same tone*): I am listening. (*Stands still.*)

ANN (*continuing bravely*): I read all your poetry—but I don't understand it very well—though perhaps I will in time. I'll try. And I don't really care about communism and revolutions and the proletariat and all that—if never seems quite real to me, and somehow I don't like most of the people who are mixed up in it—the girls are *awful*—but I'd try to care about it—and if you wanted me to, I'd go to meetings and walk in processions and everything, if you *really* wanted me to. And I don't care at all about not having much money. I'm quite good at making do with things—ask Mummy. With you there, I think it would be fun. Why are you shaking your head? Don't you believe what I'm telling you?

PETER: Yes, it's not that. Only— (*Hesitates.*)

ANN: Only—it's hopeless? Is that it?

He does not answer, but looks away.

Are you in love with somebody else, Peter?

PETER (*rather impatiently*): No, of course not.

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ANN: You needn't say "of course not" like that—as if falling in love was something quite ridiculous and fantastic! People have been doing it for thousands and thousands of years.

PETER: And there's been a lot of bilge talked about it. You see, Ann, we're not interested in this romantic love business. A good deal of it seems to us just affected nonsense, and, anyhow, it's liable to get in the way of more important things.

ANN: That seems to me a very queer thing for a poet to say.

PETER (*rather impatiently*): There again, that's only because you've got an old-fashioned bourgeois notion of what a poet's like. A poet isn't a pretty-pretty ass writing elaborate drivel about some idle girl's left eyebrow. (*In ringing tone.*) I want to write poetry about men marching to freedom, roads like great arrows of stone, steel towers humming and crackling with vast electrical power, tractors ploughing and harvesting the land for the people, express night mailplanes rushing through space like rockets.

ANN (*after pause, wistfully*): And love doesn't come into it at all.

PETER: Romantic love's had more than its share of attention. Nine-tenths of it is illusion, anyhow. It's only the sexual instinct playing tricks on you.

ANN: And that's only a lot of words, Peter—and pretty silly ones, if you ask me.

PETER: We believe that men and women can be comrades together—

ANN (*sharply cutting in*): Do you? I don't. Comrades my foot!

PETER (*rather sharply*): All right, I don't want to give you a lecture. Or quarrel, Ann. But this started because, seeing that I didn't feel romantic about you, you felt sure that must mean I was feeling romantic about some other member of your attractive sex—

ANN: Don't be pompous! What is it that makes men pompous as soon as they get rather cross?

PETER (*with air of being very patient*): What I'm trying to make you understand—and this is for your own good—

ANN (*sharply*): Damn my own good! (*Pauses.*) Sorry, Peter, go on.

PETER (*slowly, rather priggishly*): The business of the poet in this age isn't to maunder about his own idiotic sick fancies—in fact, he'd better not have any—but to act as a mouthpiece—a trumpet—for the dispossessed and downtrodden masses. When they're set free, there might be time to have the sort of fine feelings and write the kind of poetry you like, though I doubt if by that time anybody will want to. In a classless society—

ANN (*cutting in with cheerful rudeness*): I know, you'll all march round in shorts, waving flags, and being comrades.

PETER (*annoyed*): Will you listen to what I'm——

ANN (*stopping him, loudly*): And everybody'll sleep with anybody and nobody'll care and it won't matter—just like one big farmyard.

She stops. He looks annoyed, turns away. She looks at him a moment, then gently:

I'm not trying to annoy you, Peter. I'm not paying you out because—you don't feel about me what I do about you. I see now that really I'm older than you. And what I feel deep-down inside me makes me wiser too. You're just a boy, who doesn't really understand yet, talking big. Sooner or later, you'll learn. I won't talk to you like this again—but—I shan't change. And if you ever want me—just—let me know Peter . . .

She looks at him a moment, smiles rather uncertainly, then goes straight back to her seat and resumes listening attitude.

PETER, *still in front, moves restlessly.*

PETER (*as if to himself*): All that I told her was true. And it's not only the party line on the question and the opinion of my group of Marxian neo-realists but also my own genuine conviction—— (*As if suddenly doubtful.*) I suppose—— (*As if convincing himself.*) Certainly it is. For a new age, you need a new kind of poetry and a new kind of poet. Fortunately, I happen to be that new kind of poet. No effort at all. Came quite naturally to me. Sex? That's all right. No harm in sex at all, or in general sexual themes. But let's treat it as the plain straightforward business it is——

Here MRS. A., KATH., LADY S. and ANN give a little sneering snigger together. PETER stops and regards them with suspicion.

All this Romance—what was it? The amusement of parasitic women of the leisured class. An escape from reality.

Now as if delivering a lecture to an audience of which the four women are the only visible members.

The more tender-minded members of the ruling class have always wanted to avoid the facts, why? Because the facts have never been very pleasant to contemplate. They didn't want to think about the world in which they were the exploiters. So they escaped into an unreal hot-house world of Romance, deliberately confusing the elementary and necessary matter of the sexual instinct with all kinds of clotted idealistic nonsense.

LADY S. (*calmly, clearly*): My God, what a bore you are!

KATH.: He knows this isn't true.

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MRS. A.: Of course he does. There's *somebody*.

ANN: Somebody—somewhere. And why couldn't it have been me?

PETER (*changing his manner altogether*):

Yet—once again—hollowness, emptiness,
Desolation inside, just as if here

Hand on chest.

The desert began and stretched to infinity,
Sand and old bones under a brassy sky,
And the skull that grins at the vulture . . .

With sharper tempo.

Before me are houses, streets, buses, trams:
Stop, Go; Stop, Go; and Keep to the Left,
Cross Here, Tickets Please, No Smoking, All Change.
Try It Now, All The Winners, Why Pay More?
A mush of faces and a mush of minds,
A jelly of dead eyes. All magic gone.
From this bargain basement called the world.

With great force and passion.

Where is the garden where my lost love walks?

Here the whole lighting should change, as if the room had vanished. Possibly the cyclorama could be lighted and one of the windows brightly lit from below. He could run back to this window and sit in it, looking down, as if from a great height. We should see nothing and nobody but him.

We do not understand the men we are;
Our eyes are not our eyes; there is a heart
Feeding the imagination with strange blood
That's not the heart our mothers heard at night
Wondering what names to give us. Births and deaths
We celebrate in other modes of being.

Because a queen walked in a garden once,
A nameless face these eyes have never seen
Turns all the faces in the world to stone . . .

It might be Nefertiti the Sun queen
Before the temple where the seven-stringed harp
Could never match the music of her glance;
Or Argive Helen who set Troy on fire
And kept it burning through the long day-dream
Of eighty generations. Or Semiramis,
The golden dove, who conjured Babylon

Out of her loosened hair. It might be Deirdre
Of the white shoulders and the honey-mouth,
Or red-gold Guinevere with the April eyes,
Or Mary of Scots, the delicate witch of love,
A sweetness spilled like wine in the grey North,
Bringing poets out of the heather. O heart
That does not beat this side of the moon yet draws
The very red out of the rose, leave me in peace!

He should come forward again now and the lights be as they were before. He speaks rather quieter now, though still as a poet reciting.

Perhaps I still pretend. I am a child,
Wandering, lost, in a vast mansion of dreams——

Enters from L. a middle-aged woman dressed in the style of about twenty years ago, rather shabby, a woman of the provincial lower middle-class. This is MRS. CHILHAM. She comes forward timidly, hesitantly.

MRS. C.: Please, sir—could I speak to Mr. Philip Chilham——?

PETER (*who obviously does not see her*):

. . . in a vast mansion of dreams,
And one small room I call the facts, and think
When I'm in there that's all there is to know

MRS. C.: Begging your pardon, sir, but I wonder if I could have
a word with Mr. Philip Chilham——

PETER (*looking right through her*):

And wonder why my heart seems haunted there . . .

MRS. C. (*looking at him, helplessly*): Oh—dear!

PETER:

I see the paper on that room's drab wall
And think the fading patterns are our lives . . .

MRS. C. (*earnestly*): You see, sir, I'm his mother, Mrs. Chilham . . .

PETER:

Music and laughter sound from the great hall
To haunt us in that room. We stop our ears . . .

He breaks off to stare, as if through a mist, at MRS. C.

Yes?

MRS. C. (*confidentially*): Yes, sir. Mrs. Chilham's the name. I'd just like to have a word or two with my boy, Philip, if it could be managed without upsetting anybody.

PETER: I'll tell him.

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Makes a slight move, then stares at her curiously.

But—aren't you——?

MRS. C. (*breaking in, easily, apologetically*): Yes, sir. In Nineteen Twenty. It's a lot past that now, isn't it?

PETER (*wonderingly*): Yes. I'll—tell him.

He goes back to his seat, touching CHILHAM before sitting down.

CHILHAM comes forward slowly, as PETER resumes listening attitude.

CHILHAM: Mother?

MRS. C. (*looking at him eagerly*): Yes, Phil. It's your mother. Are you all right, boy?

She touches him, and looks him over. After this they can sit down.

CHILHAM: I should think I am! I'm doing fine, Mother!

MRS. C.: Now, are you sure? You're not just telling me that, are you?

CHILHAM: No, why should I?

MRS. C.: Well, that used to be one of your little tricks, y'know, Phil, when you were in that frame of mind. Come home from school or from your work and tell us you were doing fine, when all the time you were getting into trouble and miserable.

CHILHAM (*with the air of a rather boastful boy*): Now listen, Mother. I make five thousand—*five thousand pounds*—a year. That's more than twenty times as much as Dad ever made.

MRS. C.: What do they pay you all that for?

CHILHAM (*same tone, with touch of defiance*): Because my column in the *Daily Gazette* is one of the best-known features in English journalism. Everybody reads it and everybody wants to be mentioned in it. They come after me in droves, Mother, famous people—just wanting me to say something nice about them.

MRS. C.: Well, I never did!

CHILHAM (*increasing the pace*): I go where I like—theatres, night clubs, restaurants—all for nothing. They offer me free holidays at big hotels. Free cigars and cigarettes and cases of whisky and clothes. I've six beautiful silk dressing gowns, all brand new.

MRS. C.: You've no wife yet, Philip?

CHILHAM (*quickly, nervously*): No, I got engaged, once—but we ~~chucked~~ it. That doesn't worry me, though. Too busy. Having too good a time. Everybody tries to get hold of me.

MRS. C. (*eyeing him steadily*): You're not just telling me this, are you?

CHILHAM (*same tone*): Of course I'm not. It's true every word. I've got one of the best flats in London, right in Park Lane. All the latest electric things—and you ought to see the bathroom! Just think if we'd known what was going to happen back in dirty old Dunley!

MRS. C. (*same steady sceptical manner*): Is this *good* work you do, Philip?

PHILIP (*with more irritation*): Of course it is. Why shouldn't it be? There are thousands of fellows who'd leap at it to-morrow if they'd half a chance and knew how to handle the job. It's a lot harder than it looks, keeping going all the time, and nosing things out, and being in the know, smart and yet keeping the ordinary human interest going. I'll tell you, I may make a packet, because what with all the things I get given, it's worth a lot more than five thousand a year, but I earn it all right.

MRS. C.: Is it *decent good* work?

CHILHAM (*faster and more nervous*): I'm telling you it is, aren't I? And didn't I say everybody came running after me? Asking me to lunches, cocktail parties, dinners, supper parties, week-ends—yes, big swells too—you'd be surprised. And it's not just actresses and society women and the film crowd who want me to mention them, I'll tell you, because some of these politicians and these big City men are just as bad. I was a week on a yacht last autumn. I went down to the South of France—Cannes, Monte Carlo—this Spring. I've got the biggest wireless set you ever saw.

MRS. C. (*steadily*): I'm still asking you.

CHILHAM (*almost angrily now*): And I'm telling you! I've cupboards full of clothes, dozens of silk shirts, six new dressing gowns. I've a valet—never do anything for myself. I've a big car and a chauffeur—you wouldn't recognise me if you saw me rolling round in it. Bit different from that back street in Dunley, isn't it? But, mind you, it's not just luck, I'm clever and I work hard—I tell you, Mother, you have to be on your toes to keep a contract that size with the *Gazette* and with everybody in the same game hoping to see you take a tumble—but that's all right, I can do it. I'm smart. I'm on the top and I'm staying there. I've got everything.

MRS. C. (*sadly*): What's the matter with you, lad?

CHILHAM (*almost shouting now, hysterically*): For God's sake—don't keep on at me like that—I'm telling you I'm right bang at the top—I've got everything—everything—everything—

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His voice having risen almost to a shriek, he suddenly breaks down, not crying aloud, but burying his face in his hands and shaking violently. His mother looks at him pityingly now.

MRS. C. (*sympathetically*): Now, lad, I could see it was no good and you were up to your old trick—but it can't be as bad as all that. If it is, just have done with it, and try to get something that makes you feel and look more like a man and less like a nervous wreck. Go back to where you came from—Dunley.

CHILHAM (*looking up, quietly, tragically*): I couldn't. You don't understand, Mother.

MRS. C.: Well, it isn't the first time you've said that. But why couldn't you?

CHILHAM (*same tone as before*): I'm like a man driving a racing car round and round a track. I daren't stop or make a turn—I'd crash. All I can is to go round faster—faster—faster. And I'm sick of it. And I'm frightened.

She gives him a reassuring pat or two, while he looks at her in despair. A stalwart youngish fellow in mechanic's overalls now enters slowly L. His name is TOM, and he should speak a broader version of whatever provincial accent is suggested in DIRNIE's speech.

TOM (*stands, just inside*): I'm looking for Jim Dirnie.

MRS. C. (*whispering*): I'd better be going, Philip. Now you try to do better and don't be just a silly lad.

She goes off L., giving a nod and smile to TOM, who returns them. TOM now comes nearer.

TOM: I'm looking for Jim Dirnie.

CHILHAM (*as if reciting one of his own paragraphs*): Sir James Dirnie is seen everywhere these days, and even more—these nights. Usually with Lady Sybil—Snoops—Linchester. Sir James, I'm told, suddenly emerged as a potential big man about ten years ago in the grim engineering world up North. He was appointed general manager of Matson Jones while still in his thirties, an easy record. Since then he's gone up like a rocket, appoints two or three general managers in a morning, juggles with half a dozen big engineering firms, and is often consulted by the Minister of Defence. Has one of the prettiest yachts we know, but only sees it about twice a year.

Goes back to chair, saying in ordinary tones:

TOM: Come on, Jim.

SIR J. (*coming forward slowly, hesitantly*): Oh—it's you, Tom.

TOM: Yes.

SIR J.: Well?

TOM (*looking hard at him*): Can we trust you, Jim Dirnie?

SIR J. (*with suspicion of awkwardness*): You ought to know that.

TOM (*hesitating*): Ay—but this is a big thing. And if they so much as thought I told you—it 'ud finish me.

SIR J. (*who talks with more accent now, as if a younger man*): Nay—damn it, Tom—you talk as if I wasn't one of you. It's only a year since I left the Union—and then only because I had to—you can't blame me 'cos I got a bit o' promotion. Somebody's got to look after the shed, and better me than a stranger.

TOM (*uneasily*): I know, Jim, I know.

SIR J.: We've been pals, haven't we?

TOM: Yes. But you know what some o' the chaps feel. If they knew I was letting you in—

SIR J.: I've told you, Tom, why I want to know. It isn't because o' the firm. To hell with the firm! But, as I told you, I want a few days off badly—I've got to see that girl again—and if I knew in advance what's going to happen, it 'ud make it a lot easier for me. Now, Tom—

TOM: All right, Jim, I didn't say I wasn't going to tell you. Only—for God's sake—be careful—

SIR J.: Of course, of course! Well, Tom?

TOM (*coming very close to him, lowering voice*): It's all settled. We're coming out a week on Monday, the whole bloody lot of us.

SIR J. (*earnestly*): Is that certain?

TOM: Yes.

SIR J. (*slowly but with note of excitement*): Everybody out a week on Monday! Thanks, Tom.

There is something about him, a tone, a look, that TOM suddenly dislikes, and now he puts a hand on DIRNIE'S shoulder and looks closely at him.

TOM: You've got a funny look, Jim. You wouldn't rat on us, would you?

SIR J. (*uneasily*): Talk sense, Tom! Here, I've got to go.

TOM (*not letting him go*): I don't like that look. Something wrong with it. If a feller was going to rat on his old mates, he might have a look like that.

SIR J. (*more uneasily*): Oh—come off it—

TOM (*with growing force*): If you told the bosses what I've just

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told you, Jim Dirnie, you might make yourself and break the Union—and—finish me. You might. You could.

Looks strangely at him, holding him now with both hands, then with a terrible shout.

Why—you bloody Judas Iscariot!—that's what you did!

TOM *lets him go, staring at him in horror. There is horror and guilt on DIRNIE'S face as he returns this stare. This is a long pause.*

SIR J. (*very quietly, almost amusingly*): You've been dead fifteen years, Tom. I'd have got you something, after they threw you out of the Union, but of course you had to be tragic and go on a blind drunk and end in Foley's mill pond. Fifteen years ago. I'd almost forgotten you.

TOM (*very quietly*): That's a lie, and one of your poorest.

SIR J. (*slowly*): You don't understand, you poor drowned ignorant big-mouth—you always talked too much, Tom, and it finished you—but you see all these fifteen years I've been alive, very much alive, with the sun shining on me, going up in the world, making money, knowing the big pots, getting into bed with some of their women, *enjoying myself*—so naturally I'd almost forgotten you.

TOM: Not you. There's a bit of you—and a damned important bit—that hasn't been alive these fifteen years nor felt the sun shining nor got into bed with a nice piece nor enjoyed itself—and I'll tell you why. That bit of you isn't here.

SIR J.: Where is it then?

TOM (*harshly triumphant*): At the bottom of Foley's stinking mill pond.

Goes close to him, with sombre face.

And now, Jim Dirnie, keep on enjoying yourself, just keep on enjoying yourself—if you can.

Turns and contemptuously makes noise as if spitting out, then goes off L. without a single look back. DIRNIE stands rigid, as if he heard a terrible sentence pronounced on him. Then after considerable pause, he mutters.

SIR J. (*very slowly*): Is that why? Is that why?

LADY S.: Why what, darling?

SIR J. (*slowly*): Why it doesn't matter?

LADY S.: *What* doesn't matter?

SIR J. (*quickly now*): Everything. You—amongst it.

LADY S. (*sharply*): Don't be such a lout. Have I ever even pretended to be sentimental with you? I've been quite honest. As for

you, I've always imagined that somewhere in the background there was some adventure you once had with a waitress or a barmaid or something that had left you wondering ever since why you never seemed to have all the fun you'd paid for.

Before DERNIE can reply there is heard off L. the sound of a girl calling "Snoo-oops! Snoo-oops!" LADY S. hears it and starts.

SIR J.: Well, you're all wrong—there hasn't been——

LADY S. (*fiercely*): Be quiet!

SIR J. (*annoyed*): What the devil do you——

LADY S. (*passionately*): Oh—shut up!

She is listening again, and she and we hear the voice nearer:
"Snoo-oops! Snoo-oops!"

Quick—get out!

In her impatience she pushes him nearer chairs. After giving her a wondering look, he shrugs his shoulders and returns to his chair, at once resuming listening attitude.

LADY S.'s sister, DEBORAH, now enters from L. She is a girl about seventeen dressed as a school-girl on holiday would be dressed about twenty years ago—hair "not up", etc. She is a tallish slender girl, obviously fond of outdoors.

DEBORAH (*rather excitedly*): Snoops, I've been looking for you all over the place. The extraordinary thing about you is that when you're not wanted nobody can move you and that when you *are* wanted it takes everybody *hours* to find you. And that, of course, is because you're just a young fat-head.

LADY S. (*now a youngster again*): I like that, Deb! You're only two years older than I am—and you talk as if you were about *ninety*. What's happened?

They get into a schoolgirlish huddle now.

DEBORAH: It's not half as bad as they said it would be.

LADY S.: How many will there be left?

DEBORAH: What a foul way of asking, Snoops! as if you just counted horses, like sheep. You mean, *who'll* be left?

LADY S.: Well—who—which—whatever you like—only *tell me*, hurry up!

DEBORAH: Whitefoot's not going to be sold.

LADY S. (*quickly*): He's no good to us.

DEBORAH: Don't be such a selfish little chump, Snoops. The

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point is, he's not going and I adore him. Next—we're keeping Brownie and Mack——

LADY S. (*quickly*): Bags I Brownie!

DEBORAH: Don't *snatch*. (*Laughs.*) I'd like to *see* anybody snatching Brownie—I suppose he must weigh about a ton——

LADY S.: I know. He's beastly fat, but we'll soon set about him.

DEBORAH (*pleasantly lofty*): *We?* As a matter of fact, Snoops, you'll do jolly little riding with me these next two years. I'm definitely going to Madame Marcier's.

LADY S. (*promptly*): You can *have* Madame Marcier's. It'll be beastly. June Franklin's sister went, and June said she loathed it the whole time—no fun and open air—and the most awful French girls—and a general atmosphere of frightful stuffiness——

DEBORAH (*pleasantly if proudly*): I know. I've heard lots about it. But as soon as that's over, I'll be out—really grown up, going to dances and everywhere, while you're still in the schoolroom, whacking into stew and sago pudding and hiding out of everybody's way. They'll let you stay up just to have a look at me in my new ball dress——

LADY S. (*disgustedly*): Oh—rot! Why, you always get sleepier than I do.

DEBORAH: I shan't then. Different sort of life, you see. We've nothing to do now, once the day's over, but to fall asleep. But then—when I'm out—it'll be *entirely* different. Fun! Loads of it! Mind you, Snoops, although you're such an idiot *and* the most terrible grabber, I wish you were coming out too at the same time. Then we could go round together and have a lot of private jokes. Only two years, though, I'll have to wait for you—and then we'll *really* start——

Breaks off, looking curiously at LADY S.'s face, turned away from audience.

What's the matter?

LADY S. *shakes her head and* DEBORAH *stares curiously at her as if she is slowly taking in the fact that something has changed her young sister.*

Snoops—there's—something wrong about this—isn't there?

Still staring.

You *are* Snoops, aren't you, darling?

As LADY S. nods assent.

I didn't really think you weren't—I mean, you must be *you* just as

I'm *me*—so that's all right—but you're all changed—and we're not . . .

Bewildered, slowly.

You see, we were in our corner of the garden at Brankleford—and it was the time when Father began selling so many things—and I hadn't gone then to Madame Marcier's—and I was looking forward to coming out afterwards—growing up—the fun we'd have, but—we never did, did we?—at least, I didn't—you seem——

LADY S. (*sharply, tragically*): No. No, no. Deborah, it hasn't been like—like you thought it would be—after we'd grown up. It went all wrong somewhere. Perhaps because *you* weren't there, after all, Deb. You just slipped away. You went back to our corner of the garden at Brankleford—for ever. And I've been going further and further away. And less and less things have really *mattered*. That time, that place—they were solidly real to me and could make me feel content. Everything since then has just wobbled and slipped about. I've burned up each day in the hope that to-morrow would be better. It never was. I seem to have been travelling in the wrong direction. I ought to have run back—to you at Brankleford. I know now. Underneath I never grew up, I never faced life properly. It's all wrong, I suppose, but there it is—and—Deborah—what shall I do?

In tears now, seizing DEBORAH by the arm, staring hopelessly at her.

Tell me, tell me—what shall I do?

DEBORAH *is sympathetic but can only stare helplessly at her.*
While they are still silent, RUPERT AMESBURY enters slowly from L. LADY S. does not see him, but DEBORAH does.

DEBORAH (*quietly*): Rupert, I don't know what's the matter with Snoops.

RUPERT (*quietly*): I shouldn't worry if I were you.

DEBORAH: No, but you see, I know she's unhappy—I've felt it for a long time—but it's all so puzzling—and I don't know what to do.

RUPERT (*quietly*): I don't think there's anything you can do, Deb.

DEBORAH: There must be *something*. Did she fall in love with somebody—and it went all wrong?

RUPERT: No. I doubt if she's ever really been in love with anybody.

DEBORAH: She says being grown up isn't like what we thought it was going to be.

RUPERT (*gently*): No, I don't suppose it is.

DEBORAH: She wants to be back with me at Brankleford now,

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but when we were there she was always wishing to be out of it and grown up.

They stand together looking down at LADY S., who now rises slowly, hopelessly, as if oblivious even of DEB's presence now. As she turns to go back to her place, DEB puts out a hand to stop her, but is promptly checked by RUPERT. So they watch LADY S. go back and resume former listening attitude.

RUPERT: You'll just not have to worry about her, Deb.

DEBORAH: I must, you know. She's Snoops. Nothing changes that.

RUPERT: No, but there isn't anything you can do for her—yet.

The concluding music of this slow movement now comes through very softly. Off R. SHIEL's voice is heard calling, not loudly but clearly.

SHIEL (*off R.*): Dr. Ebenthal. Doctor Ebenthal.

SHIEL now appears on platform—or if he can do it easily he can come down from platform—but must remain towards R. He is now as we saw him at first.

There emerges from the L. DR. EBENTHAL, an elderly Austrian-Jewish musician, who should be dressed in a foreign style of twenty or thirty years ago. He speaks with a marked foreign accent.

DR. E. (*smilingly*): Yes—David—I am here. I have been listening.

SHIEL (*a pupil again, nervously*): Will it—do?

DR. E.: Yes, David—it will do. It is not perfect. You are not Mozart. But now—you are a good musician. You have something to say in your music and you are beginning to understand how it can be said. Yes, I am pleased.

SHIEL: Hooray! But that first movement's not right yet, is it?

DR. E.: No, I think you announce your second subject too early, before you have properly developed the first. And it will not, that second subject, I think, bear the weight you put on it—it is too small a thing.

SHIEL (*humbly*): I know. I ought to rewrite that first movement. This second's better, don't you think?

DR. E.: Much, much better. It is not easy to get the—the true colour—of it just with the piano. I hope you have scored it lightly—especially that middle section—mostly wood wind, eh? I thought I heard some good passages for oboes and clarinets, eh?

SHIEL (*pleased*): Yes, maestro. But the last movement's the best. I hope you'll agree.

Makes a move as if to return to recess, but is halted on way by DR. EBENTHAL's next remark.

DR. E. (*wistfully*): Ach, David, we should be in Vienna again—and when you had finished we would take that score into my corner at Schwegler's.

SHIEL (*shortly*): No, doctor.

DR. E. (*surprised*): But David, you were happy once going to Schwegler's—and you loved our Vienna. Have you changed, then?

SHIEL (*gently*): No, I haven't changed. But Vienna has.

DR. E. (*making allowances*): Well, a little, I suppose—everything does——

SHIEL (*quietly but bitterly*): No, a lot. Vienna's quite different. If you were there now, they'd make you——

Checks himself.

No, you couldn't begin to understand how much it's changed. Or the things they do there now. I can't tell you what I feel about it—but the music might tell you.

He has said this, turning, just before going back into recess.

DR. E. *looking bewildered backs out L. The music comes out stronger and is terribly sad. Just before final notes are sounded, the room looks exactly as it did when the movement began. Music ends. There is the same stir as before, though now rather more subdued.*

MRS. A. (*quietly, but firmly*): Yes, I liked that—very much indeed. (*She can do lights again here.*)

LADY S. (*coolly*): M'yes. Drags a little, doesn't it?

PETER (*to ANN rather than the rest*): Too romantic and soft.

ANN (*whispering*): I think I like being romantic and soft.

LENGEL (*appearing from recess, sarcastically*): Everybody still awake?

SIR J. (*rather heavily*): Oh—yes—nothing to send me to sleep here. Played it very well too.

KATH.: Thank you, Nick.

MRS. A. (*to BENDREX, as SHIEL appears*): Charles—are you all right?

BENDREX (*slowly opening his eyes*): Yes, my dear. Just thinking, remembering. (*Closes his eyes again.*)

As MRS. A. looks at him again, KATH. puts a finger to her mouth and shakes her head.

MRS. A.: Is everybody quite comfortable?

SIR J. (*bluntly*): No, I'm not.

ACT III

SCENE: *Same as Act Two.*

LADY S.: Now, Jimmy, don't be a nuisance.

MRS. A. (*rises*): I'm so sorry, Sir James, can I——

SIR J.: I wasn't talking about the seat I'm in—or the temperature of the room. They're all right. But I'm not comfortable. (*To LADY S.*) And neither are you. (*Indicating CHILHAM.*) And neither is he.

LADY S.: Nothing wrong with me—except, if I must confess, I feel a trifle sleepy.

SHIEL (*easily*): My fault. These long slow movements can be a bit of a bore.

CHILHAM: Rather agree with you there, Shiel.

SHIEL: I was afraid you would. Well, we must try and wake you up. The next movement's much brighter.

LENGEL (*with sarcasm*): At the beginning you would almost think you were in the Savoy Hotel.

LADY S.: Mr. Lengel, you don't seem to like us very much.

SIR J.: Why should he?

LENGEL: Oh—I'm rapidly becoming just a nasty old fiddler—don't mind me——

KATH.: Nick, don't be silly.

MRS. A.: We're ready, David.

SHIEL (*cheerfully*): All right. Well—now—the third and last movement. Not very long but a bit complicated. *Allegro—agitato—maestoso nobile*, which means that it starts in a nice brisk cheerful style, to wake you up, then it becomes very agitated—y'know, worrying about life, and then it turns all grand and noble, just to end up with.

ANN (*impulsively, sincerely*): Good!

SHIEL: Ah—you approve of it turning all grand and noble in the end, then?

ANN: Yes, of course.

SHIEL: So do I.

SHIEL and LENGEL go into recess. All settle down as before and music begins. BENDREX remains motionless throughout these

scenes, with eyes closed. Once mood of music is established, it begins to fade as dialogue starts.

SHIEL (*just off, very loud*): Wake up!

LENGEL (*just off, very loud*): Come on, wake up!

SHIEL (*coming in, with tremendous zest and spirits*): Come on, come on, wake up, wake up!

LENGEL (*entering in same manner*): It's reveille. Rise and shine, my little soldiers, rise and shine. Wake up, wake up!

ANN, PETER, LADY S. and CHILHAM *rise at once*. MRS. A. and KATH. and DIRNIE *first sit up sharply, then can rise afterwards*.

LISTENERS (*indignantly*): We haven't been asleep. We haven't been asleep.

SHIEL (*in ringing tones*): You've been asleep for years and years.

Presents a large revolver at CHILHAM's head. He starts ludicrously.

LENGEL (*extravagantly kissing MRS. A.'s hand*): My dear, dear lady—can't I persuade you—as a favour—to wake up?

MRS. A. (*with surprise, perhaps pleasure*): Well, yes, you can.

SHIEL (*roaring to KATH.*): My love, my love, wake up!

Kisses swiftly but passionately.

KATH. (*melting at once*): Oh—David!

LENGEL (*sternly to DIRNIE*): Now you—see this, eh?

Produces from his coat a very large stiff folded document tied with red ribbon and holds it out.

This makes you chairman of both British Thomson-Houston and General Electric—

SIR J. (*astonished and delighted*): Good God!

LENGEL (*cheerfully*): That's better. Wake up!

Promptly bangs him over the head with the document, then turns to LADY S.

What about you? Come here.

LADY S. (*enjoying herself*): Darling—certainly.

They kiss and embrace with enthusiasm. SHIEL is now tackling ANN, smilingly.

SHIEL: Still asleep?

ANN: No—really not.

Runs and nestles against him enthusiastically, then looks at him meltingly.

I think you're sweet.

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PETER (*coming down to face SHIEL, rather harshly*): Wait a minute, Shiel. Don't forget I'm a poet. You needn't tell me to wake up. I'm never asleep.

SHIEL: And you couldn't be wider awake?

PETER: No.

SHIEL: I wonder. (*Takes out revolver and coolly fires at him.*)

PETER (*startled and angry*): Why, you fool——

SHIEL (*cutting in, masterfully*): That's all right. You're still alive. And awake. (*Taking them all in.*) You're *all* alive and awake. That's better.

LENGEL: Much better.

As these two hurry back to recess, the four women form a little excited intimate group in front, with the men forming a similar group behind and talking in dumb show.

ANN (*with happy intimacy*): I used to think I'd like to be a boy, but now I wouldn't be anything but a girl. It's lovely to be a girl.

MRS. A.: Of course it is, darling.

KATH.: Lovely, lovely——

LADY S.: To be a girl.

ANN: I simply can't describe what I feel some mornings—not special mornings—and yet everything's marvellous—as if you were going through a wood after a long long winter—and all the trees were budding and there were primroses and violets and the birds were beginning to sing again—and all *that* can be going on just with me myself . . .

As her voice dies away, LADY S. comes in.

LADY S.: But that's only the beginning. After Spring comes Summer, and after buds and pale early flowers the hushed green shade of the woods and in the gardens great crimson roses. And in the nights of summer, made magical by men's desire of us, we are ourselves great crimson roses, and our very blood has sweetness and perfume . . .

KATH.: But the joy can go deeper still, down and down to very roots, the strange sweet tangled roots. To feel the unborn child stirring, the peace that follows the pains, the groping little mouth reaching for life, the sudden lovely weight of a sleepy child . . .

MRS. A.: I've known a woman's spring, summer, autumn—and now in my winter at least I live again in memory—and safely, safely now, for what was sure and happy cannot be spoilt now but must remain sure and happy. And any evening when I'm tired of friends and music and books I can go down one of these magical corridors

of memory, and everything is waiting for me, asking to come to life again . . .

CHILHAM (*very happy and excited*): Ladies, ladies!

They now make a general group, very intimate.

I want to include all in an invitation. Y'know, after I've been dining out or after a first night and supper somewhere, I like nothing better than to go back to my flat, get into one of my dressing-gowns, give myself a last whisky-and-soda—and then, turning over in my mind the day's experiences, the people I've met, the fun and talk we've had, to write a leisurely paragraph or two, usually in my best vein. In fact, that's when I'm at my best. Now why shouldn't you all join me, and see me at my best.

SIR J.: Any time I'm free. But you know what I'd like to do—and by God I will—is to take you all in my yacht——

ANN } (*very quickly*): South Seas!

LADY S.: } Why not, Jimmy, let's go! And Jamaica and
Martinique and Trinidad.

CHILHAM: } Bali—mustn't miss that—Bali.

PETER: } Cocos and Galapagos——

KATH.: Hawaii and Samoa and Tahiti——

ANN: } Gosh!

MRS. A.: } And the Great Barrier Reef, off Queensland. All my
life I've wanted to have a look at the Great Barrier Reef.

SIR J. (*happily*): Good! Don't care what it costs. What you people don't understand is what a chap like me gets out of it all. It isn't just making money. There's a whole world of adventure in finance that you don't understand. Plans, campaigns, strategies, hair-breadth escapes, battles, wounds, victories. I've had ten times the fun out of work that I've ever had out of anything else. Once I'd got my start—and that wasn't so easy or pleasant, I'll admit—but once I was off, I enjoyed every damned minute of it.

PETER (*happily*): You've never climbed a good mountain, have you? That's living. Three or four of you—fellows you can trust—starting in the queer green dawn—the peaks rising like a parade of friends and enemies—the chancy tactics—the thrill of each new bit of conquest—the halts on the ledges—the cold pure air of the heights—the last desperate push to the summits—— (*Breaks off to cry, loudly.*) I don't know what life's about—but—by heaven!—it's good.

SEVERAL OF THE OTHERS: It's good!

PETER (*triumphantly*): Yes, and soon it's going to be much better. Look what man's done in his short space of time.

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CHILHAM: He's almost conquered the world.

SIR J.: Science, engineering, industry!

PETER: Man's discovered how to travel like an arrow—on the ground, underneath the sea, in the air.

CHILHAM: He's surveyed all the continents, charted all the seas, and made his own lakes and rivers.

SIR J.: He produces substances that never existed before. He creates new variations in plant and animal life.

PETER: He observes and calculates the movements of vast galaxies of stars and the tiniest changes of electricity within the atom. Soon it'll be he who will be the God, giving his commands to nature.

ANN (*with enthusiasm*): Hooray! And then we'll have more and more and more fun.

LADY S.: We needn't wait until then. We'll have some now.

SIR J. (*very heartily*): Do you know, I like you all, I do. (*Laughs heartily.*)

KATH.: And we like you.

CHILHAM: Of course we do. (*He laughs too.*)

There must now work up a definite suggestion of a very intimate group being merry together. The atmosphere is more important than the speeches. Everybody must relax.

PETER: I'm such a chump, but I don't mean it really.

SIR J.: I don't believe you do.

Laughs, and PETER laughs, and the women laugh.

MRS. A. (*laughing*): Of course when you think of it all—it's really very funny, isn't it?

LADY S. (*laughing*): It's just divinely idiotic. (*Laughs.*)

SIR J.: One minute we're all moping—about nothing—and then— (*Laughs.*)

ANN (*laughing*): Oh—look at Peter! (*Laughs still harder.*)

MRS. A. (*laughing*): Really—you are absurd, Ann—really.

ANN (*laughing*): But—I begin to think—of all the silly things—I've ever known—

SIR J. (*exploding*): So do I.

This sets them all over and it works up to a crescendo of laughter, all rocking and gasping in a compact group. Just as this is beginning to subside, in waves of gurgles and gasps, eye-wipings, etc., there is a terrible cry—which must suggest an agony of fear and pain—from BENDREX. This breaks up their group at once, and

they all look at BENDREX, who rises slowly and rather unsteadily to his feet, and looks ghastly.

BENDREX (*more to himself than to them*): I used to think—privately—that nothing was very real or very important. I was wrong. Now I know better. Pain is very real. Fear is very important. Pain and fear— (*He groans as if shaken by another heart spasm.*) Fear and pain. Sometimes I suspected them. I'd wake up in the middle of the night and then wonder if fear and pain might be waiting for us in the end. They are. They catch you alone in the dark. The empty dark, because nothing stays with you, not one of the things you've made such a fuss about. The houses and streets, the clubs and theatres, the gardens of your friends, cities and whole countrysides, they all go streaming away; and then there's just you left behind in the empty dark, and then suddenly you find fear and pain there. They need plenty of space—perhaps the whole universe . . .

BENDREX (*in small far-away tones*): Everything streaming away . . . cascades of darkness . . . not only streets and houses—and people—but the faces and voices of friends—going away . . . going away . . . going.

He collapses into his chair and remains motionless until his next speech comes. The others, who have been looking at him with wonder and fear, are now terribly uneasy and are beginning to be very much afraid too.

CHILHAM (*nervously*): I'm afraid. I always have been. You see, a germ—the tiniest thing you could imagine—what can it do? I'll tell you. That tiny germ can destroy everything you've got that makes life worth living. It can eat your clothes and pictures and books and houses, and your profession and your friends, eating and eating away, until there's nothing left. Just the tiniest germ can do that.

PETER (*uneasy tone*): We used to live near a lunatic asylum in the country. The lunatics used to come out in a shambling sort of procession, muttering and giggling and gibbering. I used to think—I do so still—what if everything went blank for me and then when I was properly conscious again I found myself in that procession, shambling and muttering and gibbering like the rest of them?

SIR J.: People laugh at the idea of D.T.'s—(delirium tremens). Nothing to laugh at, let me tell you. I had a brother who went down with D.T.'s, and I'll never forget it. He said things—things like big crabs—came out of the wall to get at him—they made a dry scuttling sort of noise, he said—and—by God!—I began to hear that noise myself. I tell you. There's something inside us—might be some peculiar cells in the brain—that's got whole lashings of fear to play with. Let one of those cells—or whatever they are—set to work

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on you and—by thunder—you're not just afraid, you're lost in a damned nightmare jungle of fear.

ANN: Cats! They terrify me. I can't help it. They *terrify* me. I once went out to tea and there were four or five of them—and—was nearly sick and had to run out. I've always been afraid that one day I'd find myself in a *roomful* of them and not be able to get out—and then they'd *turn* on me—ugh!—horrible!

KATH.: About two months before my first baby was born, I saw a woman in the park with a child—and this poor little thing had a veil over its face—but just as I passed the wind blew this veil aside—and I saw that this—this—creature—had a face—— And I couldn't forget it, and night after night I couldn't sleep and I prayed and prayed that my baby shouldn't be like that. And even now, just talking about it, I feel afraid again.

LADY S.: Dreams! I loathe them. I'm not frightened of ordinary things at all. I've taken the craziest risks and not given a damn. But dreams get me down. These queer shifting sorts of rooms and places you find yourself in, and the strange people, like people you know and yet not like them—devils—who come up and stare and mutter at you . . . horrible . . .

SIR J. (*grimly*): If you go on dreaming after you're dead——

LADY S. (*almost screaming*): Shut up, you damned fool! Do you think I haven't thought of that?

MRS. A. (*beginning quietly*): I was once staying in an old house in the country. It was supposed to be haunted, and though nobody saw any ghosts, it certainly had an unpleasant atmosphere. As if somebody, who'd lived in it a long time, had been terribly unhappy there. Well, one night in this house I woke up in an *agony* of fear. It was just as if in some mad dream I'd reached a place, a world perhaps, where there was *nothing* but fear—and that I'd pulled myself out of this dream, deliberately awakened myself up, only to find it was still true. Fear—pure fear—like an enormous blackness, a weight of horror, was pressing down——

BENDREX (*cutting through with a terrible cry*): Aie! Aie!

They look at him, then slowly he sits up in a ghastly parody of a chairman at a meeting and speaks now very clearly with a kind of horrible irony.

The giant ringmaster of our circus is Pain. You must have wondered why things are for ever in a flux, why all the living never rest but hurry and scurry and keep changing their shape. Pain is cracking his whip in the ring. Behind the scene is Pain. And waiting at all the exit doors is Pain. There is no escape; there is nothing else: and

all the roads lead one way. (*Nods with final irony.*) Ladies and gentlemen, I wish you a pleasant journey.

He relaxes, closes his eyes, and now remains motionless.

SIR J. (*after a pause*): I think I've known it all along. Yes, all along! That's why I've said "Come on, let's make a night of it! Hello! Sit at my table. Bring some champagne. Tell the band to put some life in it. Whoopee!" (*With cutting scorn.*) Whoopee, my foot! D'you think I'd spend my money on the God-damn fools if there hadn't been something I wanted drowning inside—(*Checks himself, remembering.*) Drowning! That's it. (*Faces them, like prisoner confessor in low miserable tone.*) Listen, I'm guilty, see? Guilty, that's what I am. Years ago I got myself a job by ratting on a pal. It gave me my start but it finished him. He drowned himself. Yes, he drowned *himself*—but (*with tremendous intensity*) Christ!—I can't drown him. I'm guilty, see? Guilty.

CHILHAM (*in frightened tone*): You're not the only one. My mother was a working woman—but she saved some money—and I said I'd invest it for her—I had to get to London—daren't ask her for it—so took it. Of course I'd have paid her back, but she died—quite suddenly she died—before I could pay her back. And now all the time she watches me. And won't believe a word I tell her.

LADY S. (*same tone*): After my sister Deborah died, I didn't care a damn—or thought I didn't—but I was nearly caught with a man in a bedroom at home—and my maid got me out of it by taking the blame herself. She was turned out, but I promised to look after her. But I didn't. She wrote and tried to see me. I dodged her. I've always dodged things but that was the worst. I know I'm a swine.

ANN (*wonderingly*): What is it that falls like a great lead weight and crushes all our happiness?

PETER: Why do I feel now as if I too had betrayed my friend and he had drowned himself?

KATH.: Why should the maid that was turned out and never helped begin to haunt me too?

SIR J.: I couldn't have taken that money from my mother—I always gave her plenty—and yet I feel guilty of that too. Guilty, guilty, guilty!

Mrs. A.: We are all guilty creatures. But we can beg forgiveness.

ANN: Yes, we can beg forgiveness.

KATH.: We can beg forgiveness.

LADY S. (*distressed*): Oh, no, we can't. There's nobody to forgive. (*She sobs quietly.*)

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SIR J. (*harshly*): We can't beg forgiveness from an empty throne. Heaven's to let, but we seem to have a longer lease of Hell.

CHILHAM (*miserably*): It's true. There is a Hell and we are in it.

As they seem to sink into misery, the music plays a triumphant chord or two, then SHIEL appears, looking impersonal, strange, majestic.

SIR J. (*harshly*): This is James Dirnie, Shiel, and I tell you we are all guilty and are in Hell.

SHIEL (*in calm impersonal tone*): James Dirnie may be in Hell, but what is James Dirnie? Nothing. And what is David Shiel? Nothing. In this world of appearances, yes, something—but only one faulty nervous system among billions, a name, a date or two, a few addresses, some remarks in the reference books, an ill-assorted bundle of habits, a rotting bag of tricks. In the real and greater world, David Shiel is a mere appearance, a part, a mask, a shadow. So I tell you—sink deeper, deeper. Forget and then remember. Go down and down and discover what you are.

He raises a hand and as they group themselves, closely together, the music announces a final majestic theme, and now the lights change so that the room seems to have vanished and we see a wide sky behind and in front of it two columns that might be part of some dateless temple. The whole effect should suggest humanity itself outside time. At the same time the dead should be grouped at one side, in such way as to suggest there are countless numbers of them, that we are only seeing the beginning of a vast crowd.

PARKS: We are those that you call the dead.

They begin to drift away.

MRS. A. (*urgently*): Rupert—my son—the child I bore——

RUPERT (*far away*): Your son even yet—but something more.

CHILHAM (*appealingly*): But you came and spoke to me, you, my mother.

MRS. C. (*far away tone*): Yes, my son—yet already, another.

SIR J. (*agitatedly*): I had a friend once—he was drowned.

TOM (*cool, far away*): A fool in a dream was all I found.

SHIEL (*calling*): Master, this music we seem to make. How does it come our way?

DR. E. (*the last of the dead*): The spirit stirs the depth of the lake, and we are the fountains that play.

The dead have faded out now, and the living make a close group as if they were one creature.

ANN (*in wondering tone*): I have gone down, down, and I am

alive and awake, but I do not know who I am, and it does not seem to matter, for I am alive, awake, and have no sorrow.

PETER: I am remembering . . . To crouch in the cave and see the great deer in the knobs and hollows of the stone and then to paint the great deer and the other creatures on the walls of the cave . . .

KATH.: It was hard at first to come down from the bare hills into the thick forests, with the children afraid of the shadows . . . but afterwards it was better . . .

LADY S.: When the men with dark faces who came for the metal went back to their ship we went with them, and afterwards when it was calm on a blue sea we sat and combed our yellow hair which the dark men loved . . .

MRS. A.: Across the desert came the soldiers with their great shining helmets and the faces of gods and goddesses upon their shields and they burned our cities . . .

PETER (*ecstatically*): I remember from the time when the world grew cold and the ice came . . .

KATH. (*ecstatically*): I remember from the time of the great flood . . .

MRS. A. (*same*): I remember from the time of the baking of bricks and the shaping of pottery . . .

CHILHAM (*same*): I remember from the time of the first canals . . .

SIR J. (*same*): I remember from the time of the first forging . . .

ANN (*same*): Remembering and remembering, not in any one time or place . . .

LADY S. (*same*): But in all times and places since there were men and women . . .

KATH. (*same*): Always going on and on, young men growing old, finding love or losing it . . .

SIR J.: And the guilt of one is the guilt of all and one cannot suffer without all suffering . . .

MRS. A.: And sorrow and expiation and forgiveness are themselves a kind of deep remembering . . .

PETER (*with great joy*): And now there cannot be you and I, or any separate selves, and we are walled in, no longer but are free, free!

The music plays a few majestic chords and a blaze of light can come from the recess.

SHIEL (*just off, very impressively*): Hail to the one great heart and mind!

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THE FOUR WOMEN (*together or split up*):

Now can we salute,
The heart beating through our hearts,
The earth's great heart
That is love itself.

THE THREE MEN (*together or split up*): Now can we salute the one mind that is ours yet infinitely greater than ours unresting until the whole world is aware of itself and wise.

ALL (*in a tremendous shout*): Hail!

ONE VOICE (*quietly and slowly*):

Forgetting much, remembering more, we find
The one great heart, the ever-enduring mind,
All love, all wisdom. So let nothing sever
This link, this binding vision. Keep us for ever.

ALL (*strongly rhythmical*): Keep us for ever. Keep us for ever, ever and ever. Ever and ever.

They are saying this to the final chords of the music, and now they are back in their places as their voices fade and the music grows louder, and the room looks as before and they are in their listening attitudes. BENDREX, who should be turned away from the audience, keeps perfectly still. Now, when the music stops, they all stir and make the usual vague appreciative noises.

MRS. A. (*who has had a glance at BENDREX, softly*): Just a moment, please, everybody. I know we all want to talk about this really great work, but I see that poor Charles Bendrex is asleep and I don't feel we ought to wake him. He needs all the rest he can get. So will you be very quiet please, until we get into the other room, where there are drinks and sandwiches.

They murmur agreement. She calls softly into recess.

Thank you so much, David. And you, Mr. Lengel. We'll all tell you what we think about it in the other room. We don't want to wake Mr. Bendrex.

She turns and sees CHILHAM looking curiously at the place in the set where the dead entered.

No, Mr. Chilham, there's nothing there, we go this way, you know.

She indicates to him, now that he's turned, then exit.

CHILHAM (*strangely confused*): Yes—of course—I was forgetting.

CHILHAM takes another puzzled glance at the wall.

MRS. A. (*gravely regarding him*): What is it, Mr. Chilham?

CHILHAM (*exchanging bewildered glance*): Oh—nothing—really. I'm sorry—it must have been the music.

MRS. A.: I hope you enjoyed it.

CHILHAM (*confused*): Oh—yes—fine! But I'm afraid I've got into a bad habit—instead of listening properly—of thinking about all sorts of things—you know——

MRS. A.: Yes, I do that too.

CHILHAM (*in sudden rush of confidence*): I came originally from a place called Dunley, y'know, Mrs. Amesbury. Just working people. My mother—(*Suddenly checks himself, giving short laugh.*)—here—I don't know why I should bore you with all that stuff.

MRS. A.: You're not, Mr. Chilham. You were saying—your mother——?

CHILHAM (*rather uneasily*): My mother? Oh—I've forgotten—some bit of nonsense—— (*Turns to KATH. who has come down near exit with them.*) Quite an interesting work, I thought it, Mrs. Shiel.

KATH. You didn't find it dull? I was afraid you might.

CHILHAM: No, not at all—slow movement a bit long, perhaps—but the rest of it first-class.

MRS. A.: I'm sure everybody enjoyed it *enormously*, Katherine my dear, and you ought to be very proud. Come along.

She leads the way out, followed by KATH. We now hear what PETER and ANN are saying, as they move slowly down.

ANN: You don't mind, Peter, if we don't stay long now?

PETER: No. One drink and a word with Shiel—and I'm through, if that suits you.

ANN (*hesitatingly, with sincere charm*): Yes, rather. And—Peter—would you be awfully bored—if you didn't just drop me at home—but came in—and talked to me a bit?——

PETER: No, I'd like that, Ann. But what do you want me to talk about?

ANN: Anything you like that's really *serious*.

PETER: Oh—if that's how you feel. I'll probably talk your head off.

ANN: My head *wants* to be talked off. Though I'd like to say a few things too.

PETER (*amused*): What things?

ANN: I don't know—yet. But when I'm listening to music, like that, I get the *queerest* ideas sometimes——

They go out. Now DIRNIE and LADY S., who have been whispering, move down. LADY S. has watched PETER and ANN. DIRNIE has watched her.

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SIR J.: You needn't look so bitterly at those two kids. They can't help being young.

LADY S.: I wasn't thinking about them. I was wondering why you'd suddenly decided to go north to-morrow.

SIR J. (*rather awkwardly*): Well—I dunno—suddenly thought I'd like to have a look round. Haven't been up there for some time. There was a fellow I knew years ago—— (*Checks himself suddenly*.)

LADY S. (*looking curiously at him*): Well?

SIR J.: Nothing. I'd finished. Better go in, hadn't we?

LADY S.: Just a minute. We can't talk in there.

SIR J.: We can do all the talking we want to do afterwards.

LADY S.: No, you see that's what I was going to say. There won't be any afterwards. I'm going to slip away very soon and I want to go home—alone.

SIR J. (*quietly*): I see.

LADY S.: I'm not angry or anything, my dear.

SIR J.: I didn't think you were.

LADY S.: I'm—just—well, that's how I feel.

SIR J.: And that's why you'd better not go home—alone.

LADY S.: What do you mean?

SIR J.: Because you're not angry. You're unhappy. Aren't you? I know.

LADY S.: All right, Jimmy, I'll admit it. Came over me just after that music stopped—nothing to do with the music—in fact, I didn't care for it much—but suddenly I felt quite bloodily unhappy.

SHIEL and LENGEL *appear out of the recess*.

SIR J. (*impressively*): What we both need are a few drinks. (*Sees SHIEL and LENGEL*.) Thanks very much. Enjoyed your piece.

LADY S. (*smiling at them as she goes*): Divine.

They go out. SHIEL and LENGEL looking rather tired, come down a bit.

LENGEL: We'll try it again some afternoon next week, I need a lot more practice on it, David.

SHIEL: I wish you'd mark those three phrases that you say are so hard to finger.

LENGEL: I will. And I'll show you where you want to give your soloist a longer rest in the third movement. But what I want now is a very large whisky and soda.

SHIEL: So do I. (*Glances at the motionless BENDREX and indicates him*.) Not very complimentary to us, is it, even at his age?

LENGEL (*going nearer*): No, I could understand him dozing off for a few minutes—but— (*Has looked at him now.*) Hello!

SHIEL *realises what his sharp glance means and joins him, looking down on BENDREX.*

SHIEL: He's not asleep, Nick.

If necessary, one of them can turn BENDREX's chair now, so that he is in full view of audience.

LENGEL: He's dead.

SHIEL (*bringing LENGEL down, urgently*): A doctor's useless now, but there'll have to be one. You go straight through to the hall and telephone for one, and I'll take Mrs. Amesbury on one side and tell her what's happened. No good frightening everybody.

LENGEL (*as they go*): All right. Poor old Bendrex.

When they have gone, there should be a subtle change of the light. If practicable, the second act music should be heard far away, a ghost of a sound. After a moment or two, PARKS comes in—from dead entrance—carrying the straw hat—and looks about him a little and then goes over to BENDREX.

PARKS: Mr. Bendrex, sir! Mr. Bendrex!

A ghostly suggestion of the sunshine light of their previous scene should now come in. As BENDREX does not wake, PARKS touches him on the shoulder. BENDREX slowly opens his eyes. PARKS steps back a little, respectfully. BENDREX frowns a little, then recognises PARKS.

BENDREX (*slowly, still an old man*): What? Ah—Parks—I must have dozed off.

PARKS: Yes, sir, I took the liberty of waking you, sir, as it's nearly luncheon time.

BENDREX (*slowly rising*): Thank you, Parks. (*Puts a hand to his head.*) Touch of headache.

PARKS: It's the sun, sir. I thought you might like this. (*Gives him the straw hat.*)

BENDREX (*half wonderingly*): Thank you, Parks.

PARKS: This is the nearest way, sir.

He indicates the entrance he came in, and then moves towards it. BENDREX puts on the hat and suddenly becomes a smiling middle-aged man and strolls off just as curtain is coming down.

CURTAIN

THE LINDEN TREE

A Play in Two Acts

TO

J. P. MITCHELHILL

MY DEAR MITCH,

I hope you will accept, with my affectionate regards, the dedication of this play. You were enthusiastic about it from the first; and it took us back to the Duchess Theatre again, in the happiest circumstances, after an interval of nearly ten years, during which it looked as if we should never work together in the Theatre again. To have you on the management once more, together with my friends of the Westminster venture—and Dame Sybil and Sir Lewis Casson playing so beautifully—this has been happiness when I had almost ceased to dream of finding it in the Theatre. So far as the play itself has any virtue, it was a virtue plucked out of necessity. The heaviest snowfall the Isle of Wight had known for about a hundred years found me down at Billingham, in a house hard to warm and then desperately short of fuel. Besieged by this cruellest of Februarys, I ate, toiled and slept in one small room, and there the Lindens were born; and for ten days or so, while I worked at the play, they were almost my only company and the people I seemed to know best. And then—what luck!—I was back with you, back with the others, back at the Duchess, and all went miraculously well. So please accept the piece as a tribute to our friendship and your love of the Theatre.

Yours ever,
J. B. P.

CHARACTERS

PROFESSOR ROBERT LINDEN
ISABEL LINDEN, his wife
REX LINDEN, his son
DR. JEAN LINDEN, his eldest daughter
MARION DE SAINT VAURY, his daughter
DINAH LINDEN, his youngest daughter
ALFRED LOCKHART, University Secretary
EDITH WESTMORE, a student
BERNARD FAWCETT, a student
MRS. COTTON, housekeeper

The Linden Tree—Copyright, 1947, by J. B. Priestley.

"The Linden Tree" was first produced at the Lyceum Theatre, Sheffield, on June 23rd, 1947, and subsequently at the Duchess Theatre, London, on August 15th, 1947, with the following cast:

PROFESSOR ROBERT LINDEN	LEWIS CASSON
ISABEL LINDEN (his wife)	SYBIL THORNDIKE
REX LINDEN (his son)	JOHN DODSWORTH
DR. JEAN LINDEN (his eldest daughter)	FREDA GAYE
MARION DE SAINT VAURY (his daughter)	SONIA WILLIAMS
DINAH LINDEN (his youngest daughter)	TILSA PAGE
ALFRED LOCKHART (University Secretary)	J. LESLIE FRITH
EDITH WESTMORE (a student)	CARMEL MCSHARRY
BERNARD FAWCETT (a student)	TERENCE SOALL
MRS. COTTON (housekeeper)	EVERLEY GREGG

The play was produced by MICHAEL MACOWAN.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

The action takes place in Professor Linden's study, in the provincial city of Burmanley. Early spring, at the present time.

ACT I

Friday—

SCENE I. Late afternoon.

SCENE II. Two hours later.

ACT II

Saturday—

SCENE I. Afternoon.

SCENE II. Night, several hours later.

In each Act, between the Scenes, the curtain is lowered for a few moments only.

ACT I

SCENE I

Professor Linden's study. It is a large room, clean but shabby. One door, preferably set obliquely and prominently between back and left (actors') walls. Big bay window on right wall. A companion window may be presumed to exist in fourth wall. Downstage L. is an anthracite stove. Back wall and all available R. and L. walls are covered with open bookshelves up to height of about five feet, with one or two tall filing cabinets for lecture MSS etc. A fairly large table, with papers, books, pipes, tobacco jar etc., rather downstage L. of centre. A small table on back wall near door with telephone on it. As this room is often used for seminars there are plenty of chairs about, mostly oldish upright chairs near walls but also several shabby comfortable easy chairs nearer centre. Down R. a globe on stand. A few good reproductions and perhaps an excellent original water-colour or two on the walls. No domestic ornaments, and general effect that of a scholarly, cheerful, untidy, and not well-to-do man.

It is afternoon in early spring, and rather coldish sunlight is coming through window R. and fourth wall, giving plenty of light in the room but not giving it any particular richness and warmth. At rise of curtain, stage is empty and then MRS. COTTON shows in ALFRED LOCKHART. MRS. C. is the Lindens' woman-of-all-work and looks it. She is middle-aged and has a curious confused manner, which must be played seriously and not for laughs. LOCKHART is a precise, anxious, clerkly middle-aged man, soberly dressed. He wears a light overcoat and carries his hat.

LOCKHART (*seeing where he is*): Oh—I say, is this right?

MRS. COTTON: Right? It's as right as we can make it. Nothing's right now, nor ever will be, if you ask me. Half the sitting-room ceiling come down yesterday—no warning—just come down in the night—and when I saw it, I stood there—ice-cold, turned to stone, I was—an' couldn't speak for ten minutes——

LOCKHART: I'm afraid I don't understand—I meant——

MRS. COTTON: It took me straight back—see? Lived in Croydon—an' went out one Saturday morning for a bit o' fish—and one o' them buzz-bombs came—and when I gets back—it's all over—finished for ever—all three of 'em—and the home of course——

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LOCKHART (*sympathetically*): Oh yes—I remember Mrs. Linden telling me. And so when you saw the sitting-room ceiling, it reminded you——

MRS. COTTON (*cutting in, massively*): Turned to stone, I was—you could 'ave pushed a dozen pins into me, I wouldn't have known—couldn't speak for ten minutes. It's years since now—isn't it?—but sometimes I think to myself 'Suppose I'm still going for that fish'—I'm waiting outside Underwoods really an' just dreamin'—an' I'll go back an' everything'll be all right—Charlie an' Gladys an' little George—just waitin' for me—having a good laugh, I'll be bound——

LOCKHART (*embarrassed by this*): Yes, I see what you mean. I——

MRS. COTTON: No, you don't. Why should you? I don't blame you. (*More confidentially, and impressively.*) Sometimes I feel that if I could just turn a corner somewhere—or squeeze through a narrow gap—it'd be all right again—an' I wouldn't be 'ere in Burmanley but in Croydon with everything all right—(*she points to the window*)—the sun's not the same now. Perhaps that would be different. (*With sudden change of manner, sensibly.*) But you'll 'ave to see Mrs. Linden in 'ere—'cos of the sitting-room ceiling, see?

LOCKHART (*glad of this return*): That's what I meant. I was afraid you thought I'd come to see Professor Linden——

MRS. COTTON: No, I 'eard you—Mrs. Linden, you said. Besides he's at the college on Friday afternoons, always—couldn't even meet the family this afternoon. They've just come in a big car—all the way from London. Plenty of petrol—money no object—that's the son, Rex——

LOCKHART: Oh—is he here?

MRS. COTTON: Yes, with his two sisters. All smart as paint. She's showing 'em their bedrooms. All excited. There'll be trouble 'ere this week-end. Ceilings comin' down—that's a start. You'll see. It's the Professor's birthday to-day. Watch out for that. Big changes comin'. I'll tell Mrs. Linden you're 'ere. (*Moves nearer door, then turns, confidentially.*) Don't believe all she says, she's too excited. 'Cos Rex is 'ere. I'd 'ave bin the same.

She goes out, leaving LOCKHART bewildered. He stares about him a moment, tries a chair tentatively, then rises just before
MRS. LINDEN enters. *She is a woman in her late fifties, not very smart but now dressed in her best, and with a brisk vivacious manner.*

MRS. LINDEN: Oh—Mr. Lockhart, I hope you haven't been waiting long. Poor Mrs. Cotton isn't—well—you know—quite——

LOCKHART: No, I gathered that.

MRS. LINDEN: Only at times, when things happen to upset her. We've had an accident to the drawing-room ceiling. This house is really in a shocking condition, and Robert won't make a fuss about it to the bursar—it's University property, you know—*your* property.

LOCKHART: Shall I say something to him?

MRS. LINDEN: I really don't think it matters now. Ten years ago was the time. But *do* sit down, Mr. Lockhart. So good of you to call so promptly when you're so busy.

LOCKHART: Not at all. I enjoyed the walk across. The early tulips are out on College Green. Very pleasant.

MRS. LINDEN: I've never cared for them. Tulips have never seemed like real flowers to me—more like something from a decorator's. All the children have just arrived, you know—Rex, Jean, and even Marion, who's come all the way from the very centre of France. Rex has just driven them down from London. So the whole family will be here this week-end—for the first time for years. Can you imagine what that means? No of course you can't—not really. Now—*(as she says this, confidentially, she sits fairly close to him and looks at him earnestly)*—I want you to consider this little talk of ours as being strictly between ourselves—very confidential. Even my husband doesn't know about it, and I'd much rather he didn't, if you don't mind.

LOCKHART: No—of course not—if you really think—

MRS. LINDEN: Yes, I do—most decidedly. It's about him, this little talk. And I'm appealing to you not simply as the secretary of the University but also as a friend. And Robert and I have always regarded you as a friend.

LOCKHART: I'm very glad, Mrs. Linden. And of course if there is anything I can do—

MRS. LINDEN: Poor Mr. Lockhart! How often have you to say that?

LOCKHART: About thirty times a day, at least. Including letters of course. But this time I mean it. Usually I don't.

MRS. LINDEN: Yes—well—

LOCKHART *(encouraging her)*: Yes?

MRS. LINDEN *(plunging in)*: Is there a definite retiring age for professors here at Burmanley?

LOCKHART: There *was*. Sixty-five.

MRS. LINDEN *(pleased)*: Ah—I thought so.

LOCKHART: The late Vice-Chancellor ignored it. And of course

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during the war it was very convenient to keep on the older professors. But now——

MRS. LINDEN: Yes—now? What is the attitude of this new Vice-Chancellor—I never remember his name——

LOCKHART: Dr. Lidley.

MRS. LINDEN: Dr. Lidley. What's his attitude? He's not very old himself.

LOCKHART: About forty-five, I believe.

MRS. LINDEN: I'm sure *he* doesn't want old professors.

LOCKHART (*hesitantly*): Well—no—he doesn't.

MRS. LINDEN: He doesn't like my husband, does he?

As LOCKHART, embarrassed, does not reply.

Oh—I know. Robert doesn't like him. And you needn't look like that, Mr. Lockhart. I'm not talking to you now as the University official. You're here as a friend—and it's all in confidence. Dr. Lidley and my husband don't get on, do they?

LOCKHART: Well, of course they represent two different points of view—about the University, I mean. Totally opposed, really. Professor Linden left Oxford to come here—didn't he?

MRS. LINDEN (*emphatically*): He did—much to my disgust—though it's all a long time ago. And he promised we'd get back to Oxford some time—and look at us!—but go on.

LOCKHART: Well, he's always wanted Burmanley to be as like Oxford as possible. Dr. Lidley's quite different. He's been a very successful director of education in several cities. You might describe him as a high-pressure educationalist——

MRS. LINDEN (*quietly, but firmly*): Mr. Lockhart, frankly I don't care tuppence what Dr. Lidley is. The only time I met him he seemed to me one of those bright beaming bores. I hope I never see him again. And that's what I wanted to talk to you about.

LOCKHART: What—about not seeing the Vice-Chancellor again?

MRS. LINDEN: It amounts to that, really. My husband is sixty-five to-day. He ought not to stay here in Burmanley any longer. He's tired. He's been here far too long already. He'll never keep up with these new programmes of work you're introducing. (*She breaks off to look hard at him, then softly.*) Mr. Lockhart, I can tell by the look in your eye that already—and quite recently—you've heard somebody else say what I've just said about my husband.

LOCKHART (*embarrassed*): Really, Mrs. Linden, that's not fair——

MRS. LINDEN (*getting up*): Wives can't afford to be fair.

As LOCKHART rises she regards him smilingly.

I think you're fond of Robert, aren't you?

LOCKHART: Yes. Most of us are—I mean, the older lot here.

MRS. LINDEN (*very quietly, slowly*): Well then, if you want to do him a kindness, you won't oppose any attempt, by the other side, to get rid of him. He ought to go. And though he's obstinate, he won't stay where he's not wanted.

LOCKHART (*staggered, stammering*): But—but surely—if he himself——

MRS. LINDEN (*cutting in, hostess now*): Won't you have a cup of tea? It's here, I think.

LOCKHART: No, thank you. I must be getting back to my office.

MRS. COTTON *enters, either with a large tray or preferably pushing a trolley, with tea for five or six persons—bread and butter and cake on it.*

MRS. COTTON: Family's just coming. I've told 'em it's ready.

She goes out, leaving door open.

MRS. LINDEN: Well, just stay and say "How d'you do" to Rex and the girls.

Enter JEAN, MARION and REX. REX is the eldest, about thirty-five, good-looking, cool, humorous, very self-confident, well-dressed in an easy fashion. JEAN is a trim handsome woman in her early thirties, a clear-cut and rather cold type at a first glance, very much the professional woman. MARION is a year or two younger, pretty, softer, very well-dressed in French clothes.

REX (*to LOCKHART*): Hello! Remember me?

LOCKHART (*shaking hands*): Yes, of course, Rex. You're looking well.

REX: I'm feeling quite remarkable.

MRS. LINDEN (*to her daughters*): You remember Mr. Lockhart, the University Secretary, don't you?

As they smile, she turns to LOCKHART.

This is Jean—now Dr. Jean Linden, if you please, and on the staff of the North Middlesex Hospital. And this is Marion, who's come all the way from the centre of France, because now she's Madame de St. Vaury.

REX: Really an old-world French aristocrat who wonders what Burmanley is all about.

MARION (*not pleased at this*): Don't be an ape, Rex.

JEAN (*coldly*): I know what he means, though.

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LOCKHART (*hastily*): It doesn't seem long since you were both schoolgirls—and now—well—makes me feel old. Wasn't there a René de St. Vaury up here just before the war?

MARION (*smiling*): Yes. Then I met him again in London, during the war, when he was with de Gaulle. And that's how it all began. We've been married four years—two children now—

LOCKHART: Splendid!

MRS. LINDEN: You're sure you won't stay to tea?

LOCKHART: No thank you. Well—nice to have seen you all again.

Smiles and nods, and they all murmur "Good afternoon" or "Good-bye" and MRS. LINDEN takes him out. The other three look at each other.

REX (*softly*): I'd say that mother's up to something with poor little Alf Lockhart. I saw it in her eye. What about some tea?

MARION: Mother'll want to pour out. (*Surveys tray with disgust.*) Just look at it—ugh!

JEAN: Yes, fairly sordid. But we're all used to that. And what can you expect?

MARION: Well, that's what I mean. If one of our maids brought in a tray looking like that, René or his mother would have a fit.

REX (*taking a piece of cake*): This is Labour England, ducky. Not your Catholic aristocratic old world, with a nice black market on the side. And not Jean's new world. (*He has been nibbling at the cake.*) If sawdust was easier to get, I'd say this cake was sawdust.

MRS. LINDEN *returns, smiling, closing door behind her.*

Well, Mother, what are you up to with poor little Alf Lockhart?

MRS. LINDEN: Just a little chat about your father. Now let's sit down and be cosy. You'd like some tea, wouldn't you, Rex?

REX: A cup, certainly.

JEAN: And so would Marion and I.

MRS. LINDEN: Naturally, dear. But men don't always want tea—that's why I asked. I'm afraid this cake won't be very nice.

REX: It isn't. I've tried it. Stiek to the bread and butter.

MRS. LINDEN *is now pouring out; JEAN and MARION are sitting near her; and REX hands bread and butter and cups, etc., and throughout the following speeches they are having tea.*

MRS. LINDEN: Such a shame you couldn't bring the children, Marion.

MARION: It really wasn't possible. And Belle-Mère was quite furious even when I said I'd like to bring them.

MRS. LINDEN: She seems to forget they have another grandmother—

MARION: No, that's not fair, Mother, when she and René are always suggesting that you should come and stay. We were talking about it one night last week when Father Honoré was dining with us—he's really very witty—and— (*She breaks off.*)

MRS. LINDEN: Yes, dear?

MARION (*shortly*): I'll tell you later. Don't let's bother about it now.

MRS. LINDEN *looks from her to JEAN enquiringly*. REX, *who misses nothing, takes it up*.

REX: Marion's quite right, Mother. Only leads to trouble. She and Jean were at it on the way coming up in the car. And Father Who's-it is practically a detonator for Jean.

MRS. LINDEN: Well, really, Jean—if Marion wants to talk—

JEAN: I didn't stop her. And Rex is exaggerating—as usual.

MARION (*heatedly*): No, he's not. And if you're unhappy, Jean—it's not my fault is it?

JEAN (*coldly*): Unhappy? I'm not unhappy. What are you talking about?

MARION: Oh come off it. I'm not one of your hospital patients. Do you think I don't know you. You're miserable about something—I don't know what it is—so you're taking it out of me—or trying to do—just as you always did—

MRS. LINDEN: Now, Marion, you shouldn't talk like that.

MARION: But it's true, Mother. And as soon as I say anything that reminds her that I'm a Catholic now, she says something hateful and hurting. No, Rex, I'm not going to start arguing all over again. I agree with you—there's been too much already. I'm simply going to say this. I became a Catholic at first simply for René's sake. But now I'm more than glad I did. And the more I see of the rest of you—no, not you, Mother—and—of everything here—the more thankful I am that I am a Catholic—and—have a Faith—and—belong to a community that may be old-fashioned, as you call it, but is still civilised. (*Defiantly to JEAN.*) Now go on—call me a Fascist again—

JEAN (*coldly*): Why—do you enjoy it?

MRS. LINDEN: Now, stop it, both of you. If this is how you two go on, then I agree with Rex—there mustn't be any more of it.

MARION: I'm sorry, Mother. I've finished.

MRS. LINDEN: *Is there something wrong, Jean? You're looking—well—rather strained, dear.*

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JEAN (*curtly*): I've been working too hard, that's all. We're all overworked at the North Middlesex. And we're terribly short of nurses—and domestic staff. Short of everything—except patients. Oh—forget it.

MRS. LINDEN: Couldn't you apply for some easier post somewhere?

JEAN: Not just now. But I'd like to find something not quite so futile. Half the people we try to patch up might as well be dead—they're only half alive—

MARION (*heatedly*): I call that wicked—yes, downright wicked—

JEAN: I wouldn't call it anything, if I were you, unless you're prepared to leave your delicious chateau and all your devoted peasants and take night duty for a few months.

MARION (*heatedly*): And that's—

REX (*cutting in, massively*): Girls, turn it up. We've had enough of it. We were asked up here for an urgent family reunion—business *and* pleasure, I hope. And the Catholic-Communist debate is now closed for the week-end.

MRS. LINDEN: Just what I was going to say, Rex. And Dinah and your father will be back soon—

REX: How is young Dinah—and why isn't she here?

MRS. LINDEN: She's practising with the orchestra this afternoon and nothing would induce her to stay away. She's very well and happy, really, but still the oddest child you ever knew. More tea, anybody? It isn't very nice, I know, but poor Mrs. Cotton, who likes nothing better than making tea all day long, really hasn't the least idea how to make it properly.

JEAN: Most of them haven't. They can't do anything properly.

REX: Don't care for the masses really, do you, Jeanie?

JEAN: No, of course not. That's why I want to see them turned into sensible civilised creatures.

The telephone rings. JEAN starts up, but REX, already standing, forestalls her.

REX (*as he goes*): I'll answer it. I'm expecting a call. (*At telephone.*) Hello! Yes, it is. Yes—speaking. Go ahead. . . . Yes, Fraser, Rex Linden here. . . . Yes, what did he say? . . . I see, well offer him twenty-five—cash down—as soon as he likes—if he walks straight out of the place, just taking his personal things and any sentimental bits and pieces, and leaves the rest. . . . Yes, twenty-five thousand—cold cash. . . . All right, ring me here later.

Comes away, looking pleased with himself, takes out cigarette-

case, offering it to his mother and MARION, who shake their heads, then to JEAN, who takes one. He lights hers and his during following speeches.

MRS. LINDEN: What was that about, dear? Some more of your mysterious business?

REX: No, not really. You remember my telling you about a nice little country place in Hampshire—small manor house with about ten acres, and all the comforts?

MRS. LINDEN (*excitedly*): You're going to buy it?

REX: You heard me. Twenty-five thousand, lock, stock and barrel Sir Charles walks out, Mr. Rex Linden walks in. I think he'll take it too, though he'd get far more if he auctioned everything. But he's in a hurry for the cash—wants to go to Africa.

MRS. LINDEN: But, Rex darling, that'll be wonderful. And—you know—just at the perfect time. Goodness—I hope you *do* get it.

REX: I'll lay ten to one I do—and to-night too. You'll see.

MARION: But—can you afford to put down twenty-five thousand pounds—just like that?

REX: Yes. And quite a good deal more, ducky. I sound a vulgar type, don't I? Perhaps I am. It's a solemn thought.

MARION: But how do you make all this money, Rex? I don't understand. What do you *do*? René was asking me that, the other day.

REX: I toil not neither do I spin.

JEAN (*dryly*): We know that.

REX: I live on my wits and gamble with the boys in the City. A kind of racketeer really—free of tax too. A de-luxe model Spiv.

MRS. LINDEN: Darling, nobody knows what you're talking about.

JEAN (*rising*): I do. And he's right. What about these tea things?

MRS. LINDEN (*rising*): We'll clear and wash up ourselves—I really can't ask Mrs. Cotton. I wish we could have gone out for dinner to-night, but really it's hopeless here.

They are now moving the trolley or tray and various tea things. As they move through door, front-door bell, not too close, is heard ringing.

MRS. LINDEN: Rex, would you mind seeing who that is?

Stage is empty for a moment or two. Then REX returns with EDITH WESTMORE, a student, about twenty, carrying a cheap little case for books, note-books, etc. She wears spectacles, has untidy hair, rather shabby wrong clothes, but is not altogether unattractive and must not be grotesque or comic. She has a provincial accent,

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which must not be overdone, and has a strained manner, a mixture of shyness and defiance. Her general effect is likeable but rather pathetic. REX's manner with her has more charm than his lines might suggest.

REX: You'll have to wait, I'm afraid. My father isn't back yet, though I gather he's expected at any moment.

EDITH: Yes, I was at his lecture. I—we—well, there's another student too—we always see him at this time every Friday—we write an essay for him every week——

REX (*smiling*): I know. Explain the Thirty Years War. Do sit down.

She does. He remains standing.

Good lecture?

EDITH (*with enthusiasm*): Oh—yes. Wonderful. He makes it all seem so clear—and so exciting—and it's hard to take notes—and then afterwards—somehow—— (*She hesitates.*)

REX: You can't remember a dam' thing.

EDITH: How do you know?

REX: I was a history student once. (*Produces his cigarette-case, a very expensive one.*) Have a cigarette while you're waiting.

EDITH (*hesitating*): Oh—well—thank you.

Takes one. He offers her a light. She smokes rather awkwardly. He looks at her quizzically.

REX: You're using the wrong shade of lipstick, y'know.

EDITH (*helplessly*): Oh—am I? Yes—I expect I am.

REX: You need a darker shade. Do you mind my talking like this?

EDITH (*rather dubiously*): No—not really. It's a bit—embarrassing—of course. You live in London, don't you?

REX: Yes, I'm a West End type now.

EDITH: Well, I haven't much time—to make myself look nice. And no money. I have a scholarship—and you can only just live on it, if you don't expect help from home—and I don't.

As he continues to regard her impersonally.

Well—what else is wrong? You seem a bit of an expert.

REX: I am. Now—suppose you take off your glasses——

She does.

and then pull your hair back—and then up—let me take your cigarette—no, not quite like that—further back—then up——

He does, then, following his instructions, she pulls her hair back in a much more becoming fashion. She now looks quite different, quite attractive, and smiles at him uncertainly.

Makes a tremendous difference. You'd be surprised. Now any sensible young man would want to kiss you.

She does not react to this, but still holds her face up, smiling uncertainly.

I mean more or less—like this.

He bends down and kisses her, neatly and warmly but not passionately. When he steps back again, she releases her hair, gives a queer choking little sob, turns her face away, and fumbles for a handkerchief.

Oh I say. This is all wrong. I didn't mean—

EDITH (*cutting in, chokingly*): No, it's not you. . . . I didn't mind . . . it's something quite different . . . suddenly I felt so miserable . . . as if everything is so hopeless . . . oh where's my rotten handkerchief?

REX (*offering his*): Take mine.

She does, and dabs at her eyes.

Why should you suddenly feel miserable—as if everything was hopeless?

EDITH (*brokenly*): I don't know—I'm a silly fool—it's all so muddled up—

REX: Never mind. What's the essay about this week?

EDITH (*still weepily*): Charles the Fifth.

REX: Here, try the cigarette again.

Gives it to her. She puts it in her mouth and now puts her glasses on again.

Do you care about Charles the Fifth?

EDITH (*rather desperately*): No. I've tried—and Professor Linden's so kind—and I must do well—they're all expecting me to, at home—and my essay is so dull and stupid—

REX (*softly*): I'll tell you a secret about Charles the Fifth, if you promise not to mention it to my father.

EDITH (*a mess of smoking, half crying and laughing*): All right. What is it?

REX: Charles the Fifth doesn't matter a sausage. I haven't thought about him for years, and I'm having a hell of a good time.

EDITH: Yes, but it's different for you. There's no money at home—and I only just managed to get this scholarship—

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REX: You stop worrying, and make the best of yourself and of everything else. What's your name?

EDITH: Edith Westmore.

REX: Well, Edith, that's my advice to you. Start living. There isn't much time.

EDITH: Isn't much time for what?

REX: For anything. And none for Charles the Fifth. He had his share. We'd better take ours while we can.

EDITH: It's all right talking like that. But I believe you're just making fun of me.

REX: I'm not. Never was more serious in my life. I tell you, there isn't much time.

There is a pause, while she looks at him dubiously and he stares quite sombrely at her. Then DINAH enters, carrying a 'cello case and a pile of music and books. She is eighteen, and a young eighteen, and a very clear eager personality, quite different from anybody else in the play, as if she belonged to another race.

DINAH: Rex!

REX (*who is clearly fond of her*): Hello, Dinah!

He goes up, kisses her on the cheek and rumples her hair, already untidy.

DINAH: Sorry I wasn't here when you came—did you bring Jean and Marion——?

REX: Yes.

DINAH: Good. Well, I just had to go to orchestra practice.

REX: And how was it?

DINAH: Gosh!—we were awful. (*She now notices EDITH.*) Hello!

EDITH (*subdued*): Hello!

DINAH: Isn't Daddy back yet? I think he's trying to buy some sherry. It's his birthday to-day and we're having a sort of family gathering.

EDITH: Perhaps I'd better go.

DINAH: I shouldn't, now you're here. Hang on a bit. Yes, we were quite peculiarly awful this afternoon. Were you ever in the orchestra, Rex?

REX: Yes, I played the triangle and the tambourine one term—about the time of the Great Depression. What is it murdering now?

DINAH: Dvorak's *New World*. And this afternoon we got all the parts boxed up, and one time Mary Stockfield—that's the other 'cello—and I were playing the third movement when everybody else

had gone back to the first. I thought it sounded rather interesting—a bit like Bartok—but Old Nubby, who's our conductor, hated it and danced with rage. How are Jean and Marion?

REX: Inclined to be quarrelsome types. Partly ideology. In the car it was like giving a lift to Thomas Aquinas and Lenin. And then for a bonus you have to add feminine sniffiness and odd jealousies. They're much better apart, those girls.

DINAH: I must go and talk to them. I hope you brought Daddy a lovely present. After all, you're the rich one in this family.

REX: I am and I did. A case of pipes—very special. Took a lot of finding, let me tell you—

DINAH (*who is still near door*): Sh! I think he's here. (*Opens door and calls.*) Daddy, they're here.

REX (*going towards door, calling*): And this is me—Rex.

REX *goes out, leaving door open.* DINAH *smiles at EDITH, who rises rather nervously.*

EDITH: I'm sure he won't want to bother with me to-night.

DINAH: Well, you can see—though it is all rather special to-night. Doesn't that gloomy boy usually come with you on Fridays?

EDITH: Yes. Bernard Fawcett. I don't know what's happened to him.

DINAH: Just brooding somewhere, I expect. Well, I must go and see my sisters. Haven't seen them for ages.

EDITH *takes her essay out of her case, still standing up.* Then PROFESSOR LINDEN *comes in.* He is carelessly dressed but has a certain distinction. He looks his age and is obviously rather tired, yet there is a kind of youthfulness about him.

PROFESSOR: Hello, Dinah! Good rehearsal?

DINAH: Awful!

DINAH *exits.*

PROFESSOR: I hope you haven't been waiting long, Miss Westmore. I hadn't forgotten, but I was held up. Do sit down. Where's Fawcett?

EDITH (*sitting down*): I don't know, Professor Linden. I haven't seen him this afternoon.

PROFESSOR (*filling a pipe*): Well, we'll have to do without him.

EDITH: Professor Linden, I thought—perhaps—as all your family are here—you probably wouldn't want to bother about us to-night.

PROFESSOR: No, no. But I won't keep you long, if you don't mind. Is that your paper? Thank you.

She hands it over. He lights his pipe before looking at it, sitting on edge of arm-chair.

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EDITH (*timidly*): Can I say—Many Happy Returns——?

PROFESSOR (*smiling*): You can—and thank you very much. Sixty-five, you know. I ought to feel something special, and I've been trying all day and can't manage it. The last time I felt something quite definite was when I was forty—and I've never felt quite so old since. Now then——

He begins skimming through the essay with a practised eye, then breaks off to take up a portfolio and hand it to her.

You'll find some reproductions of old Peter Breughel in there. Have a look at 'em. He's a great favourite of mine. Earthy and elfish at the same time. Real life but with bits of magic starting to work. Look at the Winter and the Summer and the peasants boozing and romping.

As she does, there is a knock.

Come in.

BERNARD FAWCETT *enters*. *He is a rather dour, aggressive youth, who has a cold. He is shabbily dressed and carries some books.*

FAWCETT (*thick and sniffy*): I'm sorry I'm late. I went to the chemist's and couldn't get served.

PROFESSOR: I was late myself. And I'll have to cut you short to-night, I'm afraid. A family reunion here. Let's have your essay—and sit down.

FAWCETT hands over his paper, and sits down. PROFESSOR now glances quickly at this one, as he did at EDITH's. After a moment or two of this, he glances at FAWCETT.

Dull, isn't it? (*Waving paper.*)

FAWCETT: I expect it is. When I have a cold I can't get interested somehow.

PROFESSOR: Miss Westmore couldn't either. All a long way off—and who cares?

EDITH (*looking up*): I'm sorry, Professor Linden.

PROFESSOR: How do you like those Breughels? Fascinating, aren't they?

EDITH: Yes—but I'd like to look at them a long time.

PROFESSOR: You can, if you like. Take 'em away with you. But the point is—that man was one of Charles the Fifth's subjects. And, allowing for old Breughel's temperament, you have to see Charles against that sort of background. Makes a difference, doesn't it?

EDITH (*impressed*): Why—yes—somehow I never thought——

PROFESSOR: No, you saw it as a lot of dim stuff in a book to be mugged up this week for Old Linden. So did Fawcett. Didn't you, Fawcett? With real life roaring all round you. Tell me—weren't you

two both mixed up in that recent row about girl students at the Union?

EDITH (*eagerly*): Yes, I was. And I don't care what anybody says—

FAWCETT (*cutting in, alive now*): Wait a minute, before you start talking. I'll bet the Professor doesn't know—

EDITH (*cutting in, sharply*): Oh—I don't mind telling him how it all began. It wasn't our fault, not to begin with—

FAWCETT (*cutting in, louder*): Of course it was. If you girls hadn't insisted—

EDITH (*cutting in, louder*): We had a perfect right to insist. Look, Professor Linden, this is what happened—

PROFESSOR (*firmly*): Miss Westmore, I don't really want to know.

EDITH (*disappointed*): Oh—I thought you did.

PROFESSOR: No, I only wanted to show you both what history really is. And among other things—it's the row about the Union. And now it's come to life, hasn't it? It's important. It's serious. It's urgent. And each of you is ready to talk for the next hour about it at full speed. Now remember what you felt when you were writing these things—dead as mutton—(*indicates the two essays*). Let's forget about them, shall we?

Tears them up neatly and drops them into wastepaper basket. Then he rummages in his pockets, finally producing a square invitation card.

This—is a ticket—to admit two—to a meeting—probably an Indignation Meeting—of the Burmanley Citizens' Vigilant Society—to be held to-morrow afternoon in the Town Hall. Our friend Professor Crockett is among the speakers, and Crockett's always worth hearing. Now I suggest you go together, note-book in hand, to this meeting, and each write an essay for me—On the Influence of Tudor England upon the Burmanley Citizens' Vigilant Society.

FAWCETT (*astonished*): Tudor England?

PROFESSOR (*firmly*): Tudor England—and the Burmanley Citizens' etc., etc.

EDITH: But how can it? I mean, there won't be any possible connection between Tudor England—and—and this meeting—

PROFESSOR: Well, if there isn't, then say so. But I think there's sure to be. Even without going to the meeting, I can think of several possibly important links.

FAWCETT (*who has risen*): We can try anyhow. (*Hesitates*). Professor Linden, can I ask you something—?

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PROFESSOR: Yes. Charles the Fifth?

FAWCETT: No, sir. What do you think's the best for a cold?

PROFESSOR: My dear chap, for sixty years I've been dosed with everything, beginning with eucalyptus and steadily progressing to sulphur drugs—M. and B.—this and that. I suggest prayer, fasting and patience—and don't encourage the wretched thing by *enjoying it*, so to speak. Try to think about something else—European History, for instance——

Enter MARION, who stops when she sees the students.

MARION: Oh—I'm sorry, Father.

PROFESSOR: No, come in, Marion. We've finished. I've cheated them out of fifty minutes to-night.

As MARION comes forward.

Two of my students—Miss Westmore—Mr. Fawcett—my daughter, Madame de Vaury.

They murmur "How d'you do's", both students standing.

Now—Fawcett—here's the ticket. To-morrow afternoon, both of you. And if my subject still doesn't make any sense to you, look in sometime after to-morrow afternoon and tell me about it. Borrow the portfolio if you like, Miss Westmore.

EDITH (*taking it, with her other things*): Thank you very much.

PROFESSOR: And the same time here next week, if you don't look in before—for help. (*He goes to door, holding it open for them smiling.*) And I liked your letter in the Rag, Fawcett. Quite wrong, every word of it, but I liked it. And keep taking a peep at Old Breughel, Miss Westmore. Good night. Good night!

EDITH and FAWCETT (*as they go*): Good night, Professor Linden.

They go out. He closes the door and smiles at MARION.

PROFESSOR: Well—now.

She kisses him on the cheek.

MARION: Many happy returns, Father.

PROFESSOR (*holding her arm*): Thank you, Marion.

MARION: And I've brought you a very nice present. Two bottles of very good Armagnac.

PROFESSOR (*delighted*): Armagnac! My dear girl, what a wonderful present. I haven't tasted any Armagnac for six or seven years at least. Every single sip will be a holiday in France.

MARION: It's hard to get even in France now. But René managed it. He sends his love. He couldn't possibly get away—he wanted to come, of course.

PROFESSOR: And the children?

MARION: Fat and flourishing. I've brought some photographs. You'll see.

PROFESSOR: Of course I shall see. (*Looks at her appraisingly.*) You're looking well, Marion. Happily settled there now? The truth, mind. Just between us.

MARION: Yes, I *am* happily settled now. It wasn't easy at first—harder than I made it out to be—they were all very kind but they made me feel a stranger—French people of that class are terribly clannish and close——

PROFESSOR: I know. It must have been like trying to push your way into a haystack. And René's mother looked a cast-iron Balzacian terror to me—a grenadier of the Old Guard.

MARION: Well, it's all right now. And the Church part of it has helped a lot. That and the children. So now I'm one of them.

PROFESSOR: I suppose that's possible, if it's what you want to be. And, I remember you always wanted something different—somewhere round the corner. And this must be it.

MARION: Yes, and I feel even better about it now that I've come back here. (*With sudden feeling.*) Oh—Dad, it's no use—I must tell you. I hate it here. It's so messy and drab and slovenly. I never liked it, but now it's much much worse. Look at those two who just went out—they were bad enough before the war, but they weren't as awful as that pair. I hate to think of you, being here, with that scruffy half-crazy Mrs. Cotton slouching about the house—and trying to teach history to dreary, shabby little half-baked students like those two. Just the very look of them——!

PROFESSOR (*mildly*): They're not my brightest. But they're better than they look. Perhaps we all are now. I know something about them—where they come from—how they struggled to get here—the odds against they're being any good at all—and—well, I can't agree, my dear. This is Burmanley, you know.

MARION: Yes, and I never want to see it again. No, never, never. You must come and stay with us from now on, Father. That's what René says too.

PROFESSOR: I'll try, though holidays abroad aren't easy.

MARION: But Daddy you look so tired—and——

PROFESSOR: And old. Go on, say it.

MARION (*gently*): Well, you do look much older, Dad—older than you ought to look. When I think of René's Uncle Gustave, who's years older than you really. It's coming from Vaury—and the life

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there—— (*She breaks off, looks at him uncertainly.*) Can I say this, Dad?

PROFESSOR: You can say anything you like, my dear.

MARION: Mother says you have some money coming to you now, from your endowment insurance. You could easily find some official excuse—health or a book or something—to drop everything here and come and live near us at Vaury.

PROFESSOR: And why should we do that, Marion?

MARION: Because it's a much better life than you find here. Better in every way. It's still part of the old civilised tradition, Father. Especially if you could do as I've done—and become a Catholic. I can see that Father Honoré was right—that's the secret—the Faith. That—and the land—and all the old tradition of living. (*Rather defiantly.*) I mean it, Father. At first I did it all for René, of course, but now I know it was worth doing for its own sake. I couldn't live any other way.

PROFESSOR (*easily but with some gravity*): That's your affair, Marion. I always said it was, and never tried to interfere, did I?

MARION: No. Mother did a bit, at first. But not you.

PROFESSOR: So if it's what you want, and it satisfies you——

MARION: More than that—makes me deeply happy——

PROFESSOR: Then that's all right. But you mustn't try to give it to me. Or to most of us. We tried it once—the peasants—the proprietors in their castles—the priests—the whole tradition—and then it didn't work. It doesn't work now, except in spots here and there. And those places really depend on other places, like Burmanley here, for instance. There's another side to the medal, Marion—a very dark side too. Sometimes as black as the shirts of Fascist bullies or the faces of the Moors let loose in Spain. You're living a very pleasant life, no doubt, my dear, but it can't solve a single major human problem——

MARION: It's solved mine.

PROFESSOR: But not mine—not ours—not the world's. No, my dear, I'd feel as if I were living in the Palm House at Kew. All right for a holiday—but——

JEAN *enters*. *He turns and sees her.*

Well, Jean!

JEAN: Hello, Father. Many happy returns!

They kiss.

I've brought you some books, I left them upstairs. Beckel's new social history is one of them.

PROFESSOR: Thank you, my dear. I'll enjoy disliking Beckel again—two parts Marx, one part Freud, a dash of Pavlov, and sprinkle well with sociological jargon. Now I spent half an hour this evening acquiring a bottle of what is probably not much better than cooking sherry. I'll go and uncork the muck for us.

He goes out. JEAN goes down and sits.

MARION (*after pause*): How do you think father is looking?

JEAN (*with professional calm*): Not too bad—he's sixty-five, you know.

MARION: You've seen him since I have. I had rather a shock. I think he looks tired—and older than he ought to look. I've just told him so.

JEAN: That must have cheered him up.

MARION (*bitterly*): I suppose he's probably another of the people you think might as well be dead.

JEAN (*angry, but calm*): Don't invent stupid insensitive things like that and then put them into my mouth. Though it's rather typical, that trick.

MARION: Typical of—what?

JEAN: Of you nice old-fashioned Christian souls. I've often noticed it.

They are silent for a moment, angry with each other, glaring.

MARION: I believe the only explanation is, Jean, that you're jealous of me.

JEAN: What? René and your stuffy little chateau—

MARION: No. But jealous of what I'm feeling—my peace of mind.

JEAN: We've got bottles and bottles of your peace of mind in the dispensary. We inject it into the bad cases—

MARION (*losing her temper*): Oh—don't be such a conceited fool. And so childish!

JEAN (*angrily*): Well—really—after the infantilism you've treated me to, for the last eight hours—

MARION (*angrily*): Oh—shut up!

As they glare at each other, DINAH, who now looks tidier, enters with a tray with small glasses on it.

DINAH (*cheerfully*): What you two ought to do is to take some whacking great wallops at each other—and then you'd feel better.

JEAN: I don't say you're wrong, but for all that—don't be cheeky.

DINAH: All right, but don't go and muck up Daddy's birthday

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between you. And, look here, what's the idea of everybody turning up for it this time?

MARION: Well, can't the family get together for once?

DINAH: Yes, of course. But there isn't somehow a nice Christmassy getting-togetherness about all this—it's more like business—like characters in old plays and novels all coming to hear the will of the late Sir Jasper read out by Mr. Groggins, the old family solicitor. So what's the idea?

MARION: It's to clear up one or two things. About Dad retiring—and so forth.

DINAH: He won't retire—and it looks like a plot to me. There's a plotty atmosphere about, particularly round Mother. (*She looks at them, and suddenly laughs.*)

JEAN: Now what is it?

DINAH: I suddenly remembered that time—oh, years ago when I was quite little—when we were staying in North Wales—and you two had a row about toothpaste or something.

MARION (*smiling*): It was cold cream stuff for sunburn—and we fought—do you remember, Jean?

JEAN: Yes—and the stuff came out and went over everything.

DINAH (*sitting on arm of chair*): That was a heavenly place—it smelt of whitewash and cows, and had gigantic fluffly brown hens—and I was just part of it—magic. That's what I don't like about growing up. You stop being part of places like that. You just look at them as if they were in a shop window. You're not swallowed up by them any more. And what do you get in exchange—by growing up?

JEAN: Consciousness—a more highly developed ego.

DINAH: I know. I can feel mine having growing pains. But I doubt if it's worth it. Marion, mother said if you really want to add a few fancy French tastings and touches to the dinner, now's the time. And Rex is messing about in there, trying to do something but I don't know what.

MARION (*rising*): I can't be worse than Rex.

She goes out.

JEAN (*rising*): Dinah, where's Dad?

DINAH: Trying to find the corkscrew. He always loses it.

JEAN (*quietly and quickly*): I want to put through a call to the hospital. If I can get through, will you please rush out and hold Dad up a minute or two until I've had my call?

DINAH: All right.

As JEAN goes up to the telephone.

I'll bet this isn't hospital work, though—but some love business—some man you're miserable about—

JEAN (*at telephone*): Is that Trunks? This is Burmanley—Two Five Eight One Three—and I want Northern—London—Five Four Eight Four. . . . Yes, I'll wait. . . .

DINAH: Isn't it?

JEAN: Yes, it is.

DINAH (*coolly*): I guessed it. I knew you were miserable anyhow. But this is more like Marion than you. I thought you considered this romantic sort of love a lot of silly old-fashioned rot.

JEAN: I do. But that doesn't make it any better does it?

DINAH: No, I suppose it might make it worse. Because you couldn't enjoy being miserable.

JEAN (*bitterly*): And might despise yourself too. (*To telephone.*) Is that the North Middlesex? Dr. Linden here—put me through to Dr. Shalgrove, please. . . . (*To DINAH, urgently.*) Go on, Dinah. Hurry—please!

DINAH, who has wandered up towards door, hurries out.

(*To telephone.*) Dr. Shalgrove, please. . . . Oh, Dorothy, this is Jean. Yes, I'm speaking from Burmanley. I must know about Arnold. Has he gone? (*With an effort.*) I see. And no message for me at all—not a word? . . . I see—just gone—like that. . . . No, I'm all right . . . to-morrow night, I hope. . . . (*With a greater effort.*) By the way, Dorothy, I forgot to leave a message to Crosfield—that he ought to look at that child in Five . . . yes, that's the one, and I'm not satisfied . . . yes . . . yes . . . good-bye, Dorothy.

She puts down the telephone slowly, and comes down rather blindly, fighting her emotions. She sits down, trembling, gives a choked kind of sob, clenching her fists, fighting hard.

PROFESSOR LINDEN now enters carrying two different bottles, one of sherry, the other without a label. He gives a glance at JEAN, who has not looked round, and takes in her situation, so that we feel that his speech that follows is giving her a chance to recover. As he talks, he potters a bit with the bottles and glasses.

PROFESSOR (*beginning as he enters*): Well, we've a choice of two aperitifs—my sherry, which may or may not be any good, and a mysterious concoction that Rex has brought, specially put up for him by one of his favourite barmen. It'll probably make us all roaring drunk. Except Rex of course, who probably has it for breakfast. (*He pours out a little, and sniffs it.*) It smells like something that

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probably goes with Big Business in Shanghai. We'd better try it, I suppose.

Slowly, while talking, he pours out several glasses of this stuff, of a dark amber shade.

It's a curious thing about Rex. He does, with complete ease, all the things I wouldn't know how to begin to do—such as compelling important West End barmen to mix bottles of this stuff—hob-nobbing with head-waiters—sitting up late with millionaires—and making money just by making it. All the things I've probably secretly wanted to do all my life. Rex is just busy representing my unconscious self. You too, in a way, Jean, for all that opening up of people, and cutting and stitching inside 'em, which you do without turning a hair is precisely what's awed and terrified me as long as I can remember. You and Rex—your'e the Lindens in reverse, so to speak. Not Marion—she's too completely feminine. But there's Dinah, though. Now she's unblushingly blazingly happy, which is something most of us older ones haven't dared to be for years and years and years. It's as if human nature, which doesn't propose to give in, is now producing a new race, like Dinah, who can't be downed by anything.

JEAN (*not turning, muffled*): There's a lot she doesn't know yet.

PROFESSOR: I don't believe it'll make any difference when she does.

Hands her a glass, holding one himself.

Now try this, my dear. And—your health, Dr. Linden. (*Drinking.*)

JEAN (*doing her best*): And yours—Professor. (*She takes a sip.*)

PROFESSOR: Got a warm disreputable flavour——

JEAN (*with an effort*): I've—had it before—once or twice. (*She gives a sort of gulp.*) Oh—damn! You know something's wrong, don't you?

PROFESSOR: Yes. Tell me if you want to.

JEAN (*turning now, urgently*): I can't. But I thought you guessed I wasn't feeling—very bright. Oh—I get so impatient with myself. Why can't we be as hard as steel?

PROFESSOR: Because it would do us more harm than good. The dinosaurs had that idea—it was probably the only idea they did have—and so they grew more and more armour, thicker and thicker scales, bigger and bigger claws and spikes—all to be hard and tough and safe—until they were like hundred-ton tanks—and couldn't move, couldn't feed themselves, couldn't mate—and were done for. Then came the turn of the soft little monkey people, who could adapt themselves—us.

JEAN: And are we going to manage it?

PROFESSOR: Probably touch-and-go. On the whole I think—Yes. But not by wanting to be as hard as steel. That's asking to be broken. (*He puts a hand on her shoulder.*) Jean, my dear—just take it easy.

Impulsively she turns and puts her cheek against his hand, and whispers.

JEAN: All right, Dad. I'll try. And—thank you.

Enter REX, carrying a handsome case of pipes.

REX (*holding out the case*): Here they are, Dad. And easily the pick of the market.

PROFESSOR (*who has turned, taking case*): Why—Rex, my boy—these are prodigious. Thank you—thank you. I didn't know there were such pipes any more.

REX (*taking glass*): There aren't. I had to comb London for 'em. Collectors' pieces really. Been in that case for years and years, the chap told me. Well, Dad—cheers for the Birthday. (*He drinks, then smacks his lips.*) Very fond of this stuff.

Enter MRS. LINDEN, MARION and DINAH.

MRS. LINDEN: Mrs. Cotton's just dishing up, but we've time for one of these drinks we've heard so much about.

REX (*gaily*): There's Dad's sherry—or the stuff I brought, *Later Than You Think*.

MRS. LINDEN: What do you mean, dear?

REX: That's the name I gave it—the barman couldn't think of one. From the old Chinese saying—"Enjoy yourself—it's later than you think."

MRS. LINDEN (*gaily*): I don't know what you're talking about, darling, but give me just a little—please.

MARION: And sherry for me, Rex.

DINAH: Me too, please.

REX pours his stuff for his mother, while the PROFESSOR pours out sherry for the other two. REX then fills the glasses of JEAN and the PROFESSOR and his own again, throughout the following speeches.

MRS. LINDEN (*happily*): Well now, I call this a thoroughly sensible way for a family to behave——

REX: You mean—all tippling, eh?

MRS. LINDEN (*beaming on him*): I mean, being all together under one roof—instead of scattered all over the place. Well—now——(*preparing to drink*).

DINAH: We all drink to Daddy.

MARION: Yes, of course.

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REX (*grinning*): To the gnarled old trunk of the Linden tree!

MRS. LINDEN: He's not gnarled. And anyhow—what about me?

REX: You're not the trunk—you're the roots——

MRS. LINDEN (*who has had a sip*): It's terribly strong—isn't it?

JEAN (*standing now*): Yes, it always was. (*Drains her glass in one go.*)

MRS. LINDEN: Jean, are you all right?

PROFESSOR (*hastily*): Yes, she's all right. And I thank you for the Toast—(*burlesquing after-dinner speaker*) both for the terms in which it has been proposed and the way in which you have received it——

REX (*similar burlesque*): Hear—hear!

MRS. COTTON, *wearing apron and looking hot and rather flustered appears at door.*

MRS. COTTON: Well, I like to see everybody 'appy for a change—but you'd better go in an' eat that dinner 'cos it's in now an' getting cold——

She disappears, and laughing a little, the others all turn and move towards door, as CURTAIN comes down.

This is the end of SCENE I.

House lights do not go up, and curtain remains down only long enough for bottles and glasses to be cleared, curtains drawn across window R. and lighting to be changed, for night.

SCENE II

When CURTAIN rises again, it is two hours later. Stage is empty a moment, then PROFESSOR, carrying tray with bottle of Armagnac and several glasses, enters with REX, who is lighting a cigar. After PROFESSOR puts down tray—during first speeches—he lights one of his new pipes. There is an intimate after-dinner atmosphere between the two men.

PROFESSOR: Rex, being a parent I have to pretend to understand you, but as a matter of fact I don't. What do you do and what are you up to?

REX (*stretching out, comfortably*): It's so simple that hardly anybody believes me. First, what do I do? Well, I make money—by buying stocks and shares—and then selling them at a handsome profit—all for myself, not for other people. I'm not a broker.

PROFESSOR: You must have some kind of flair for it.

REX: I have. But it's easy, believe me. You work ten times as hard as I do. And now I'm worth—well, what do you think?

PROFESSOR: I've no idea. More than I am, certainly.

REX: At least a hundred and fifty thousand, at this minute.

PROFESSOR: Good God! It's incredible. But how have you managed it—in this short time?

REX: Jock Mitchell was killed by the same mortar that knocked me out in Italy. He was my best friend. When I came home I found he'd left me all he had—but you know all this. I came in for a nice little packet of stocks and shares that poor Jock hadn't bothered about. After I recovered and was sent to the War House, I began playing about with 'em. Made money. Made more money. Got in the know. Paid no taxes, don't forget. Lived well, but still piled it up. Every time some bit of news made the fools in the City feel shaky, I bought. The minute they felt better again, I sold.

PROFESSOR: It couldn't be as easy as that.

REX: It was. Plus some information and perhaps, as you say, a flair for it. As to what I'm up to—that's quite simple too—I'm enjoying myself—while there's time.

PROFESSOR: You don't see it lasting, you mean.

REX: I don't see anything lasting. If you ask me, we've had it. And you can take your choice between a lot of Trade Union officials giving themselves jobs and titles or Tory Big Business screaming to get back into the trough. All the same racket. Either way we've had it. We can't last. And anyhow when the atom bombs and rockets really start falling, whichever side sends 'em, it's about ten to one we'll be on the receiving end here. I've sometimes thought of clearing out—South America, for instance, or East Africa—but somehow I feel that wouldn't do. So I'll take what's coming. But before then I propose to enjoy myself.

PROFESSOR (*regarding him steadily*): I believe you're quite serious.

REX: Not a serious type as a rule—do a lot of clowning—but for once—and purely out of respect for you and this occasion—I'm in deadly earnest. What about some of Marion's Armagnac?

PROFESSOR: Sorry. I'd forgotten.

REX (*rising*): I'll do it. (*Goes to pour out brandy.*)

PROFESSOR: Thanks. I don't agree with you, of course.

REX: Naturally. I didn't expect you to.

PROFESSOR: But we won't argue. That's not the point. I simply want to understand. All this of course is a reaction, first, from what

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you were before the war, and then from soldiering—the usual dose of post-war cynicism.

REX (*handing brandy*): No doubt. But it's not a mood. It's permanent. For instance, not long ago, I broke with a young woman because she wanted us to marry and produce children. Nothing doing. So I broke it off—though I was very devoted to her. I wouldn't mention that to mother, by the way. She'd want to know all about it, and start worrying.

PROFESSOR: She would. And I could do a little worrying, myself. Doesn't it occur to you, by the way, that if we're drifting to disaster, you might try using some of your money and wits and energy in some kind of attempt to stop it.

REX (*after a sip*): Damned good brandy!

PROFESSOR (*who has also tried it*): Isn't it?

REX: You mean—politics, eh?

PROFESSOR: If necessary—yes.

REX (*feeling in his pockets*): The other night I was reading some of Waley's translations of old Chinese poems, and one of them particularly took my fancy so I copied it out. (*He has found it now, and reads it out.*) It's called *The Big Chariot*.

“Don't help on the big chariot;
You will only make yourself dusty.
Don't think about the sorrows of the world;
You will only make yourself wretched.

Don't help on the big chariot;
You won't be able to see for dust.
Don't think about the sorrows of the world;
Or you will never escape from your despair.”

(*Puts it away.*) And I couldn't agree with him more. I wish I could dig that poet out of his grave and ask him to stay with me at Huntingdon House for a few weeks—we'd laugh ourselves sick. Don't look so depressed, Dad. You're not responsible for me any more, and you did your best to turn me into a fine thoughtful public-spirited citizen.

PROFESSOR: Perhaps I did it the wrong way. That's what I'm wondering. I'm not depressed. I'm wondering. You've changed utterly. What happened? That interests me.

First, losing Jock—and some of the other chaps. Then that War House—and war-time London. But even then I was put my shoulder to one of the back wheels of the big

chariot—and be as dusty as hell—if somebody big enough had shouted “Come on, chaps. Throw in everything you’ve got. Either we’ll work miracles or go down fighting.” Something like that. The words don’t matter. But the mood does, and the inspiration—just to have one good crack at it before the bombs came again—or perhaps they would never come if we showed the world a great example—gave ’em all hope again. Look—I’m talking too much—and most of it bullsh, I suppose—

PROFESSOR: No, it makes sense to me. You were ready—if somebody gave you a lift—

REX: Yes. But not a sausage. So I said to myself “All right, Rex, you pack it up—earn some easy—and play.” And I do enjoy myself—don’t you believe those people who tell you that you can’t nowadays—they don’t know enough. Oh—you can’t in Burmanley but you can where I live—if you know a few chaps and have the money.

Enter JEAN. REX turns and sees her. Just in time for a little serious conversation.

JEAN (*coming down*): There’ll be some coffee in a minute.

PROFESSOR: Have some brandy, Jean?

JEAN: Not just now, thank you. Is Rex telling you how to make money without working for it?

PROFESSOR: No, he’s been explaining why he believes in making money without working for it. Eh, Rex?

REX: Fair enough. Mine’s the Spiv philosophy now—only mugs work. It’s everybody for himself, isn’t it? Nobody’s shown me anything else for the last few years. Most of the place looking like a fourth-rate factory and a dingy fun-fair—a nasty little mess of silly cheap newspapers, greyhound tracks, football pools, squealing capitalists, trades unionists on the make, sleep-walking civil servants, kids wanting to behave like touts or tarts—

PROFESSOR: Not much to enjoy then?

REX: Oh yes—if you just push it all away and forget about it. And that’s where money comes in. You can buy a high wall or two—and bid for a little civilised amusement behind them. Look at Jean. I run into her now and again—with her boy friend—and they’d try to convert me. What’s his name—I mean, the surgeon chap at your place?

JEAN (*very carefully*): Arnold French. He’s just left, by the way.

REX (*looking at her curiously*): Has he now? I thought you and he—

PROFESSOR (*cutting in, deliberately*): Convert you to what?

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REX (*grinning, to JEAN*): Tell him.

JEAN (*coldly*): It doesn't matter. I don't want to talk about it. And Rex wouldn't want to talk so much if he didn't know he was all wrong, with his delicious undergraduate's cynicism and Epicurean muck. We—I mean, I happen to believe in science and a properly planned community—and discipline—and work——

REX: And forced labour camps for anybody who won't join in——

JEAN (*coolly*): Yes—and why not? I've no use for people who won't face a few hard facts——

REX: You haven't much use for people of any kind, my dear Jean, except a few interesting patients—and your handsome Arnold——

JEAN (*suddenly furious*): Oh—for God's sake—shut up, you fool!

REX (*staring*): Look—Jeanie—I'm sorry. I didn't realise——

JEAN: Oh—drop it. (*She recovers herself by a great effort. Then speaks in a low, bitter tone.*) I'm just not going to run away and bawl in a bedroom.

PROFESSOR: There's probably something to be said for it, though. An old custom.

JEAN (*same tone*): I don't like old customs. And I hate all the idiotic feminine fusses and tantrums—and I've seen enough of them. And what's the use of asking for a disciplined scientific society, if I can't even discipline myself—a woman with a good scientific training?

PROFESSOR: All right, my dear. Only don't imagine that a scientific training turned you into somebody from another planet. You're still just one of us, you know—the same old muddled emotional gang, who've been here for a few hundred thousand years. And don't try to fight all your feminine ancestors—there are too many of them. Better to come to terms with 'em.

REX (*getting up*): And have some Armagnac now—do you good.

JEAN (*with a faint smile*): All right, Rex. And—sorry for the outburst.

He gets some brandy for her.

PROFESSOR: We have a new Vice-Chancellor here—a Dr. Lidley.

REX: I know. What's he like?

PROFESSOR (*gloomily*): He's an educationalist. He educationalises—in quite a big dashing sort of way. It's something quite different from educating people—newer and much better. They'll probably have machines to do it soon, when they can import them from America. Two of my oldest friends here—Tilley and Clark—have already resigned. I believe he's hoping I'll go next. I won't say I see

it in his eye, because he always gives me the extraordinary impression that he has two glass eyes, which must be wrong. But there it is.

REX and JEAN exchange glances, which PROFESSOR notices at once. He continues calmly.

Fortunately you two haven't that kind of eye. Far more expressive. But what exactly did those glances mean?

JEAN: We were wondering—at least I know I was—why you should think it worth while going on here.

REX: Right. Dad, why not pack it up now?

PROFESSOR: We can't all pack it up, as you call it, Rex. And one packed-up man in a family is probably quite enough. As for you, Jean, who are not a packer-up, well, I'm surprised at you.

JEAN (*softly*): You're sixty-five now, Dad.

PROFESSOR: And one day, Jean, I hope, you'll be sixty-five—and then you may know what I'm feeling now—

JEAN (*contrite*): Dad, please, I didn't mean—

PROFESSOR (*cutting in, but gently*): I know you didn't, nobody does. They just say it, but don't mean what they think I think they mean. Mind you, I'll say this. Sixty-five is probably oldish for science. But history's different. You really know more about it—have the feel of it better—when you're sixty-five than when you're forty-five—or even twenty-five—

Enter DINAH, with a tray of cups filled with coffee.

Coffee, Dinah?

DINAH (*going to put tray down*): Coffee it is. And I made it myself while the others were finishing the washing-up—and all talking about babies. There must be something wrong with me—unwomanly or something—because I hate talk about babies. Mrs. Cotton told a mad *gruesome* story about a baby that turned blue in the blitz. Mrs. Cotton's never come out of the blitz really. In a kind of way she loves it. (*Looks at the three of them sharply.*) You've been quarrelling here, haven't you?

REX (*getting up to help with coffee*): No, we haven't.

DINAH: Well, that's what it feels like to me.

REX: You rather fancy yourself as the intuitive type, don't you?

DINAH (*coolly*): Yes, I do.

She takes a cup of coffee to JEAN, gives it to her, then impulsively bends down and kisses her on the cheek.

JEAN (*half-smiling*): But why, Dinah?

DINAH: I just felt like it, that's all. Don't you go and imagine—

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just because you're a doctor now—you're high above all that sort of thing.

JEAN (*with a bitter smile*): It might be better if I did.

PROFESSOR: No, it wouldn't. Otherwise, in a few years you might easily go sour. I've known several good clever people who went sour. After forty's the danger. If you're a professor, you call it sound scholarship, integrity and fastidiousness—but really they're old skim milk turned green. And then they begin to hate ordinary stupid people.

JEAN: And is that such a bad thing?

PROFESSOR (*sipping his coffee now*): It's fatal. Even if we don't think we're ordinary stupid people ourselves—and we probably are—we're all rooted in ordinary stupid humanity. And try to cut your roots, and you're done for. Quite good coffee, Dinah.

DINAH (*solemnly*): I added a pinch of salt.

REX (*who has tried his coffee*): And a pretty big pinch too, young Dinah.

Enter MRS. LINDEN and MARION, who are talking hard.

MRS. LINDEN: Well, that's the trouble here now. Nobody cares how things are done—they just slop about and take the least possible trouble—and if you dare to complain, they don't hesitate to be rude at once—yes, at once.

MARION: I couldn't help noticing the difference, particularly this time. I don't say it's much better in the French cities, but in the country there's still a tradition—of taking trouble, and proper service, and politeness.

MRS. LINDEN: Well, it's quite hopeless here now.

DINAH (*handing cups*): I don't believe it *is* hopeless at all.

MRS. LINDEN: You don't know what we're talking about, child.

DINAH: I do. People in shops—and waitresses—and all that. And I think they're all right—nice and matey—considering.

MRS. LINDEN: You don't remember anything better.

MARION: Just what I was going to say. You're too young to be in this, Dinah.

PROFESSOR: I'm not, though. And I know what you mean. I remember when most of these people you're talking about were terrified that one or two complaints would throw 'em out into the street and back to the Labour Exchange. You could see that fear in their eyes, hear it in their apologetic voices, and I hated it so much that I never dared to make any complaints.

MRS. LINDEN: You were always much too easy-going.

PROFESSOR: No, no. But now I can grumble like mad, and they can grumble back at me, and I feel much better about it.

DINAH (*proudly*): Daddy had a blazing row with the man at the bookshop. Didn't you, Daddy?

PROFESSOR: Yes, but I thought he won on points. (*Catching his wife's eye.*) What is it, my dear?

MRS. LINDEN: Well, we're all here. I think we ought to talk about the money——

PROFESSOR: What money?

MRS. LINDEN: The endowment insurance. It was your idea. But Rex knows all about it, and perhaps it would be better if he explained to the others.

REX (*to his father*): I think it might, you know.

PROFESSOR: Well, you're the financial genius. Not that this needs one.

REX (*specially to JEAN and MARION*): No, it's as simple as pie. For years and years, ever since we were in the nursery in fact, Dad's been paying premiums on an endowment insurance. I don't know how he did it on his princely salary——

PROFESSOR: There were always extras—royalties on my two or three books—outside examination fees—that sort of thing. But never mind about that.

REX: All right. The point is—now that he's sixty-five the money's due to arrive any moment. And the parents agreed that this was really a family insurance, for all of us to have some share if we needed it. That's partly why we're here.

PROFESSOR (*with mild irony*): But we're quite glad to see you, even as shareholders——

MRS. LINDEN: Now, Robert—this is serious——

REX: It's serious you should feel like this. We appreciate it. But apart from that, really it's all nonsense, you know. This money's all yours. We don't want any part of it.

PROFESSOR: We realise that *you* don't, my boy. But there *are* others.

REX: Well, let's see. (*To JEAN and MARION*): What do you say, girls?

JEAN: You can count me out. You spent a lot on my education—and the least I can do is to say I don't need any more money, and of course I don't.

MARION: Neither do I. I wouldn't dream of taking a penny. René and I are better off than you are.

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DINAH (*solemnly*): And I could probably manage somehow.

MRS. LINDEN (*hastily*): Don't be absurd, Dinah. We're not really talking to you.

DINAH: I don't see why not. A girl I know——

PROFESSOR (*cutting in, smiling*): Your offer is noted, Miss Linden, but not accepted. We shall be responsible for you for a few years yet, whether you like it or not. (*To the others.*) Now—are you three quite sure? Yes, you of course, Rex. But you two girls——

JEAN: Of course we are.

MARION: And you need every penny of it yourselves.

MRS. LINDEN: I knew that is what you'd all say.

PROFESSOR: Still, you had to be asked.

JEAN: You've your own future to consider. These are your savings—almost all you have—and you're sixty-five——

PROFESSOR (*rather sharply*): And still in full possession of my faculties, and still Professor of Modern History in the University of Burmanley.

MARION: Yes, but for how much longer?

PROFESSOR (*again, rather sharply*): Until I decide to resign the Chair.

There is a ring at the telephone. DINAH runs to answer it.

DINAH (*at telephone*): Hello! . . . What? . . . Oh yes he is—just a sec. . . . (*turns, holding receiver.*) It's for you, Rex. From London.

REX (*as he goes to telephone*): This'll be Fraser—about the place in Hampshire—you'll see. (*At telephone.*) Yes—Rex Linden here. . . . I thought he would . . . probably to-morrow night. . . . On Monday if he likes. . . . Yes, I'll do all that . . . nice job, Fraser. . . . 'Bye. (*Puts down telephone, turns, smiling.*)

MRS. LINDEN (*excitedly*): Rex—you've bought it?

REX: I have. Behold the new owner and lord of the manor of Four Elms, Chiddingfold, Hants. Four recept., ten bed, four bath—billiard room, sun porch, hard tennis court, croquet lawn, large garden, ten acres, small dairy—and butter for tea. You're all invited.

DINAH: Gosh!—that's marvellous.

PROFESSOR: But you'll have to put some furniture and stuff into it.

MRS. LINDEN (*excitedly*): No—everything's there—isn't it, Rex?

REX: Ready to walk into—even a man and wife on the premises. It's a wonderful buy for twenty-five thousand, but I knew the chap would never resist an offer of cash down at once.

MARION: But it's wasted on a bachelor. You'll simply have to get married now, Rex.

REX: Never. So don't try putting any of your old girl chums on to me. There's nothing doing. Incidentally, I don't propose to live there—only week-ends and holidays and so on. I'm keeping on my flat in Huntingdon House.

DINAH: You sound so grand. I can't ever believe you lived here.

PROFESSOR: This one didn't. It's another Rex who lived here.

JEAN: And perhaps we prefer him.

MRS. LINDEN (*still excited*): Now don't be silly, you two. Rex has done wonderfully well, and I'm proud of him. (*Turning to REX.*) Now listen, darling—this settles it—you know?

REX: Yes, I think it does.

PROFESSOR: Settles what?

MRS. LINDEN (*gaily*): Shall we tell him? No, we'll wait a little while.

DINAH: There's plotting. I knew there was.

PROFESSOR: Well, I don't much like plotting.

MARION (*to MRS. LINDEN*): I know. And you might as well tell him now.

MRS. LINDEN (*hastily*): No, no, I have a special reason.

PROFESSOR (*lightly but with touch of gravity*): I don't like the sound of this.

DINAH: We're out of it.

JEAN: Well, don't look at me. I don't know what it's about.

MRS. LINDEN (*to REX*): It makes just the difference—and settles everything perfectly.

PROFESSOR (*to JEAN*): It's no use. Let's ignore them. Tell me, Dr. Linden, what are your impressions of Burmanley after your recent absence from our city?

JEAN (*same manner*): My immediate impression only confirms the opinion I have held for some time about your city—that it should be pulled down and then rebuilt, on some more civilised plan, as soon as possible.

The telephone rings. JEAN jumps up.

That may be for me. (*Goes to telephone.*)

DINAH: It won't be if you answer it. Somehow it never is.

JEAN (*at telephone*): Yes, yes. . . . Oh! Yes, she is. . . . (*Turning.*) For you, Mother. Mr. Lockhart.

MRS. LINDEN *rises hastily, going to telephone.*

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PROFESSOR (*rising*): Lockhart? That'll be for me. It must be Alfred Lockhart—of the University.

JEAN (*now returning*): He said Mrs. Linden quite distinctly.

MRS. LINDEN: Yes?

PROFESSOR (*uncertainly, still standing*): Oh well—if that's the case——

MRS. LINDEN (*at telephone, eagerly*): Yes, Mr. Lockhart. . . . I see. . . . You're certain?

PROFESSOR (*going up and across*): Don't let him go.

MRS. LINDEN (*turning*): What? (*To telephone.*) No, I was speaking to my husband.

PROFESSOR (*firmly*): And I want to speak to him.

MRS. LINDEN (*turning*): Now, Robert——

PROFESSOR (*rather grimly*): When you've finished, Isabel.

MRS. LINDEN (*into telephone*): He wants to speak to you.

They look at each other for a moment as he takes the telephone.

MRS. LINDEN *comes away but remains standing, looking rather tense.*

PROFESSOR (*into telephone*): Alfred—I don't want to know what you've been talking about to my wife—that's your business. But I'm wondering if you've anything you'd like me to know. . . . Never mind being delicate about it, Alfred. We've known each other too long for that. . . . No, I don't suppose you would choose this way of letting me know, but now I'm asking. . . . (*Now he listens very gravely.*) . . . I see. . . . No, no, I know that. . . . But I don't propose to accept this, you know. No, not for a moment. I'll see you in the morning. . . . By the way, was that what you were telling my wife. . . . Come on, now. . . . I thought as much. Well, you'll see me in the morning, Alfred—and I warn you, the fight's on. (*Puts down the telephone and looks hard at his wife.*) Isabel, I don't like the way that was done. Alfred Lockhart didn't sound happy about it either. Had you been speaking to him earlier?

MRS. LINDEN: There's no need—to look and talk like that, Robert. I did have a word with him, because I wanted to know what might happen.

PROFESSOR: Why?

MRS. LINDEN: Really, Robert—you needn't take that tone! I wanted to know if possible while the children were here—so that if any arrangements had to be made——

PROFESSOR (*harshly*): The only arrangements that have to be made

are quite simple—I'm going to fight this decision by every possible means in my power.

MRS. LINDEN: But why—why?

PROFESSOR (*curtly*): Because there's work to be done here, and I'm still capable of doing it. (*Looks at the others, trying to smile.*) I've just been told that I shall be asked to resign my Chair. Officially because I've reached the official age limit, but we've had professors older than I am here for years now. Really, it's because I'm a nuisance. I'm too free-and-easy. I don't admire the mass-production and conveyor-belt system of education. I say *No* when important personages expect to hear *Yes*. And I propose to go on being a nuisance.

MARION: But, Dad, it simply isn't worth it—and if they don't want you, all right, what does it matter? You've done your share.

MRS. LINDEN: Of course he has—more than his share—hanging on for years in this miserable place——

PROFESSOR (*with some warmth*): You talk as if I were choosing a holiday resort. It's my life we're discussing. Or rather, we're not discussing—let's drop the subject. I'll go round in the morning, and point out that I still have a few friends round here.

REX: Now look, Dad——

PROFESSOR (*quietly*): Drop it, Rex. No more, to-night. I've had rather a long day, and I don't want to lose my temper (*trying to smile*). Besides, after all, it's my birthday.

DINAH (*eagerly*): Yes, it is. And I think we ought to play *Black Sam*. We haven't played it for years, and this family always used to play *Black Sam* on all holidays and special occasions.

MRS. LINDEN: Yes, dear, but now that everybody's grown up——

JEAN: No. I'd like to play *Black Sam* again.

REX: So would I. Though don't forget I nearly always win.

DINAH (*swiftly*): You used to cheat.

REX: Certainly. Cheating's part of it, after the first hour.

MARION: Have you still got the cards and counters?

MRS. LINDEN: They're about somewhere—but where, I can't imagine.

DINAH: The counters were up in somebody's bedroom the last time I saw them. Though I can't imagine why.

PROFESSOR: I think I know where the cards might be—at the back of one of the drawers in the dining-room.

DINAH: Well, you look for them, and I'll find the counters. You lot get the table ready.

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She goes out with the PROFESSOR, shutting door behind them. REX and MRS. LINDEN begin clearing papers and books, etc., off the study table throughout dialogue that follows. MARION and JEAN stand up and give them a hand too.

MRS. LINDEN: I'm afraid your father's upset and annoyed—the news coming like that—but it's a good thing really. I'll have to talk him round, of course.

REX: Well, don't rush him. He's been here a long time——

MRS. LINDEN (*dryly*): Yes—and so have I.

REX: That's not the same thing.

JEAN: No, it isn't. But you seem to have settled something between you—what is it?

MRS. LINDEN: To leave here at once—and stay with Rex. Your father wouldn't want to stay in the London flat—but now he needn't. He can stay in Rex's country house until perhaps later on, when we find some little place of our own quite near.

JEAN: And what about Dinah?

REX: D'you know, I'd clean forgotten about young Dinah.

MRS. LINDEN: I hadn't. Dinah can stay on here in Burmanley until the end of the summer term—I know several people who'd be glad to let her have a room—and then she'd better try for Oxford or Cambridge, unless she decides to go to the Royal College of Music. And of course she'll be with us during part of her vacations, at least.

MARION: Well, it all sounds quite sensible to me. Though of course you must come and stay with us sometimes.

MRS. LINDEN: Once we've left this wretched place, we can.

MARION: You've always hated it here, haven't you?

MRS. LINDEN: Always—always. I ought to have *made* your father leave, years ago. He had several good opportunities. But then the war came—and it didn't seem worth while going then. But now Burmanley's finished with us—and we're done with Burmanley. This time I really mean it.

MARION: Don't weaken on that, Mother.

MRS. LINDEN: Don't worry. I shan't. I'm getting older too—I'm nearly fifty-nine—sixty soon—and I refuse to live any longer like this. It isn't living. It hasn't been for years. Shabby, boring, dismal. What is there here for me now?

MARION: Nothing—so far as I can see.

MRS. LINDEN: Rex agrees with me—don't you, darling?

REX: Absolutely. Pack it up, I say, and come and enjoy yourself while there's still time. And you leave it to me, Mother.

He winks at her and she smiles at him fondly. JEAN is looking gravely thoughtful. MRS. LINDEN notices this.

MRS. LINDEN: Well, Jean? You agree, don't you?

JEAN (*slowly*): I don't know. I really don't know.

MRS. LINDEN: That's not like you.

MARION: No, Jean usually knows it all—right off—bang!

JEAN (*sharply*): Well, to-night for once, I don't. And it worries me. So just leave me out of it.

MRS. LINDEN (*sharply*): If it's your father you're thinking about, I'm just as anxious to get away for his sake as I am for my own. He's getting on—he's tired—most of his friends have gone——

MARION: And if his students are anything like the two specimens I saw here to-night, then they're not worth bothering about——

MRS. LINDEN: And the University doesn't even want him here any longer—(*specially to JEAN*)—so there you are.

JEAN: I'm not arguing against you.

MRS. LINDEN: No, but you're looking as if you might like to—as if—as if something was wrong, though you didn't quite know what.

JEAN: I've told you—this is one night when I don't find it easy to make up my mind—so leave me out of it.

REX (*who has been busy setting the table*): Well, that's all set. Dinah's right. What the Linden family needs is an hour or two of *Black Sam*—cheating and all. Where are these cards and counters? (*He begins to take one or two upright chairs to the table.*)

DINAH *now enters, carrying a box of counters, closing door behind her. She moves slowly and looks distressed.*

Well, here are the counters, eh?

DINAH: Yes.

MARION: Can't father find the cards?

DINAH (*tonelessly*): Yes, he's found them.

REX: What's the matter?

DINAH (*her face working, distressed*): I peeped into the dining-room as I came past. He didn't see me. He was just standing, holding the cards, staring at nothing. (*She gives a little sob. More distressed now.*) It was just as if I hadn't noticed him properly before. Suddenly—he looked so old—and tired—and so much by himself—as if everything was wrong and nobody cared—that I couldn't bear it—(*She gives a sob.*)

MRS. LINDEN (*soothingly*): Now, Dinah——

DINAH (*urgently*): It isn't *Now Dinah* at all. Nothing to do with it.

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MRS. LINDEN (*sharper now*): Now don't be stupid——

DINAH: I'm not being stupid. (*Looking at them, slowly.*) He's so sweet—and it's his birthday—and he was so pleased when he knew everybody was coming—(*with sudden anger*) and you're all whispering and plotting—and it seems so bloody mean——

MRS. LINDEN (*angrily*): Dinah, I won't have you talking like that.

JEAN (*very sharply*): Why shouldn't she if she feels like that?

MRS. LINDEN: Please mind your own business, Jean.

JEAN (*crossing to Dinah, who is crying*): This is my business.

Puts her arms round DINAH, who collapses against her.

All right, Dinah darling. You've said it now. All over.

DINAH (*muffled against JEAN*): I'm sorry. I don't know why I said it. But it was seeing him like that.

REX (*at table*): Look—turn this up, everybody. He'll be back any moment. Snap out of it, Dinah. Let's have the counters.

She gives them to him, and he pours them on the table, preparing to count them into heaps. With loud cheerful tone.

Do you remember that time up in Cumberland when the farmer came in from next door and we made him play *Black Sam* with us?

DINAH (*eagerly*): I can remember that, though I was too little to play. He had a huge whiskery sort of nose——

REX (*chuckling*): He was left with *Black Sam* every time——

MARION (*eagerly*): And he was so furious—do you remember, Jean?

JEAN (*beginning to laugh*): Yes, what did he use to say?

REX (*quoting, in Northern accent*): "Well, lay me aht an' bury me, Ah've got dom' thing again——"

DINAH (*laughing*): And then something happened to his collar, didn't it?

JEAN (*laughing*): Yes—yes—it suddenly popped——

MARION (*laughing*): I know—I nearly died—the stud went——

REX (*quoting again, uproariously*): And he said "Sitha, tha's Black Sammed me clean aht o' me collar——"

As they laugh, in the way families do at their special jokes, PROFESSOR enters, carrying box of playing cards. He lights up when he hears their laughter, which is reminiscent of their young days.

PROFESSOR (*smiling*): What's the joke?

REX (*still laughing*): That time—up in Cumberland—when the farmer played *Black Sam*——

PROFESSOR (*beginning to laugh*): Oh yes—Joe Sykes—and he burst out of his collar—and he swore to me afterwards that you were all cheating——

REX (*laughing harder than ever*): *But I was—I was—*

Here all the children give a yell. But suddenly MRS. LINDEN has stopped laughing, and has turned her face away. As the laughter dies down.

PROFESSOR (*to his wife*): What's the matter, my dear?

MRS. LINDEN (*turned away, muffled tone*): No—it's nothing—don't bother——

They have all stopped laughing now, and glance curiously at her.

PROFESSOR: All right. Well, let's play, shall we?

MRS. LINDEN: No. I mean—you all play, of course. But I don't want to.

MARION: What is it, Mother?

MRS. LINDEN: I suddenly felt awful—hearing you all laughing again—and remembering what fun we used to have. Oh—I went back long before that holiday in Cumberland—to other holidays and times—to when you were all very little—and before that—when everything was beginning for us. (*She looks rather defiantly at her husband.*) I don't know what you tell those students of yours, Robert. But I'd like to tell them something—the truth, for once—the real truth.

PROFESSOR (*gravely*): And what's that, Isabel?

MRS. LINDEN *now speaks with great sincerity and feeling, with a certain magnificence of manner.*

MRS. LINDEN: That everything just gets worse and worse—and it's time we stopped pretending it doesn't. Oh—I'm not just thinking about being short of things and having rations and queuing up. But when we were young—up to 1914—the world was sensible and safe and kind—and even if people didn't have much money, they had most of the things they wanted. They could be happy in a simple easy way—because life seemed good. Oh—the very roads and the grass and the trees and the lilac in spring were different then, and you could notice and enjoy everything, and be quiet and peaceful. And then afterwards—after those years of great black casualty lists every day—it was never the same again—never the same. But it wasn't too bad—we still didn't know all the horrors and the cruelties and the miseries—and you could go away for real holidays—and the children were such fun. But then everything got worse and worse—and look at us now, just look at us—with only a few years more and all the colour and fun and life gone for ever—I tell you, it's heart-breaking——

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DINAH (*eagerly*): Oh, Mother, you're not fair. It's just because you're not interested, so you make it all seem dull and grey to yourself. It's all terribly exciting, really, and sometimes I lie awake at night—and think—and wonder—and can hardly bear it——

MRS. LINDEN (*harshly*): No, Dinah, you don't understand what I'm talking about—you're too young—much too young——

PROFESSOR: Yes, she's too young to understand what *you* feel. But she's given you the answer, just because she *is* young. And what am I to tell my students? That because I'm getting old and weary, they mustn't believe the very blood that's beating in their veins?

MARION: But there are such things as standards, Father. And mother's quite right——

JEAN (*contemptuously*): What—just because she's talking like any elderly member of a decayed middle class?

MRS. LINDEN (*angrily*): Oh—don't talk that pompous inhuman rubbish to me, Jean. I'm being real now. I'm not quoting books but talking about real life—and what I feel here——(*indicating her heart*).

PROFESSOR: Some things are worse, some things are better. And the sun will shine for Dinah to-morrow, my love, as it once shone for you, forty years ago—the same sun. And young families are still laughing somewhere at old farmers who burst their collars. And while there's time to lose the world, Rex, there's also time to save it—if we really want to save it. And there's also time—and of course it might be the last, you never know—for a Linden family game of *Black Sam*. Give us our counters, Rex—that's your job—(*He has now taken the cards out of the case*) while the old man, with his patience, shuffles the cards. Patience . . . patience . . . and shuffle the cards. . . .

He is now shuffling the cards, Rex is distributing the counters in heaps, while the others begin to sit round.

SLOW CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE I

The scene as before, but it is afternoon again, with mild sunlight coming through the window. MARION, JEAN, EDITH WESTMORE and BERNARD FAWCETT are all standing about, having a heated and noisy argument. Door is open and through it we hear MRS. LINDEN and REX occasionally calling to each other, with a good deal of movement and bumping, and also we can hear, fragmentarily, DINAH practising bits of the 'cello part of Elgar's 'Cello Concerto. It is altogether a noisy messy sort of scene.

FAWCETT (*an aggressive debater*): How do you make that out? Just tell me that. How do you make that out?

EDITH (*heatedly*): It's your business to make it out, as you call it. Not ours. (*Appealing to MARION, her ally.*) Isn't it?

MARION (*nearly as heated as they are*): Of course it is. They think they can come along with any piffing little argument against religion, and that we have to reply, when the best minds of the last two thousand years——

JEAN (*cooler than the other three*): Wait a minute, Marion. We really can't swallow that.

FAWCETT (*disgusted*): Of course we can't. Lot o' tripe, that's all. Yes, tripe!

JEAN (*louder now*): The best minds have always been fighting the Churches tooth and nail. Just as they are to-day. And for the same old reason——

FAWCETT (*triumphantly*): Exactly—the same old reason——

REX (*off, but near door, calling*): What do you say, Mother? I know—but there's a hell of a row going on down here——

MRS. LINDEN (*off, distant, calling*): It's in the dining-room. *Din-ing Room!*

REX (*calling*): Okay! I'll go and look.

MARION: Yes, and what is the reason?

EDITH (*backing her up*): We know what it is. It's simply not to have any real moral responsibility——

MARION: To do what you like. And then you wonder why you're all so miserable——

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FAWCETT (*shouting*): Who said we're miserable? Were people any better off when they had Inquisitions and had to buy pardons and keep thousands of lazy priests and monks——

EDITH: How do *you* know they were lazy?

MARION: And anyhow people *were* better off. First, the scientists want to be free of religion, and now when they've invented atom bombs and think we'll all blow ourselves to bits with them, they're telling us it's a pity there's no religion——

JEAN: No, they're not, if they've any sense. What they're asking for is a properly planned and controlled world——

FAWCETT: Which you lot couldn't give us anyhow, and have done your best to stop——

MARION: How can you plan and control without any real authority to guide you? That's where the Church comes in——

EDITH: And if people don't worship God, then they'll worship the devil——

FAWCETT (*jeering*): Superstition! Dope! That's all you're giving us.

MARION (*amoyed*): Don't be so loutish.

FAWCETT (*to JEAN*): There you are, you see. Bad temper now.

EDITH (*angrily*): Well, you started it.

REX (*calling, as before*): Are you sure it's a *brown* one. There's a *green* one here, that's all.

MRS. LINDEN (*as before*): No, darling—the *brown* one.

REX (*calling*): And what about this basket thing? Do you really want it?

JEAN (*who apparently started earlier*): Just a little elementary psychology is what I'd suggest. And somatic medical treatment too.

EDITH: What about them? Are they supposed to explain everything—what we're doing here at all, for instance——

FAWCETT: Well, can you explain that?

MARION: We can make a better shot at it than you people can.

JEAN: But don't you see that that kind of question is idiotic?

EDITH: No, I don't. It's what I've always wanted to know—ever since I can remember——

JEAN: Yes, of course it's a *child's* question—and that's all it is. We can explain how we came to be what we are—what physical and social forces——

MARION (*crossly*): Oh—never mind about physical and social

forces—they don't give the answer—they only explain how things work——

JEAN: Well, that's the only explanation that's sensible and necessary.

EDITH (*shouting*): No, it isn't.

JEAN (*haughtily*): I'll be much obliged if you won't shout at me like that.

FAWCETT: Can't face the argument. All alike.

EDITH (*to him*): Oh—you shut up! (*To JEAN.*) I'm sorry—I won't shout any more—but it always annoys me when people talk like that. Knowing how a thing works isn't knowing what it's for.

MARION: Exactly—and that's the mistake they all make——

JEAN: There's no *exactly* about it. Reality can't be *for* anything. It just *is*. You're talking out-of-date metaphysics—and don't even know it—that's your trouble.

MARION (*hotly*): And your trouble is—you're so ridiculously conceited——

FAWCETT (*insufferably*): Now—now—now—now!

MARION (*turning on him*): Really—you're *insufferable*. Please be quiet.

Enter MRS. COTTON, if anything odder than in the previous Act. She is smoking a cigarette and carrying a cup of tea.

MRS. COTTON: 'Avin' a proper argy-bargy in 'ere, aren't you? Losing your tempers too, some of yer. (*To JEAN and MARION.*) Your tea'll be ready soon. Dining-room. Packed up to go?

MARION: Yes. At least I have.

JEAN: So have I.

MRS. COTTON: Your mother's makin' a proper job of it—an' keepin' Mr. Rex on the run all right. Yer'd think she was goin' for good, the way she's throwin' things about—never saw such a mess upstairs—every drawer out of every chest. All gone straight to 'er 'ead. Excitement. I knew it would. 'Im comin'. I'd 'ave bin just the same.

Sits on edge of chair, takes a sip of tea, and looks at the others cynically.

Well, get on with the argument. Don't let me stop yer. I like a bit of ding-dong.

MARION: No, I think we've had enough.

MRS. COTTON: My 'usband wouldn't say more than ten words for two or three days, then 'e'd 'ave two or three bottles o' stout an' argue the point about anything—shout you down too. I used to

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grumble but I wish to God 'e'd come in now an' start shoutin' me down again—an' you too——

FAWCETT (*grinning*): Perhaps we wouldn't let him.

MRS. COTTON (*with contempt*): 'E'd 'ave told you to run away an' play——

EDITH *giggles*. FAWCETT *is annoyed*.

FAWCETT: Here, wait a minute——

MRS. COTTON: What for? (*To JEAN.*) Who's this Cass Als?

JEAN: Cass Als?

MRS. COTTON: That's right. Dinah come 'ome like a mad thing early this afternoon an' she shouts "Mrs. Cotton. Isn't it wonderful? I met a man at my lesson who used to know Cass Als".

MARION: Oh—she means Casals—the great 'cellist——

MRS. COTTON: That'll be 'im. Nearly off 'er 'cad with excitement 'cos she'd met a man who knew 'im. What it is to be young an' silly. She started practisin' right off then. Proper mad thing. Not knowin' what's in store. I was the same about Fox Trots, years an' years ago, when they'd just started—mad on Fox Trots—couldn't think about work or eatin' or sleepin' for Fox Trots . . . even the name sounds dam' silly now. (*Suddenly, to EDITH.*) What are you mad on?

EDITH (*startled*): I don't know really——

MRS. COTTON: I'll bet yer don't. (*To JEAN.*) Well, what about gettin' on with the Brains Trust 'ere? Not quite time for your tea yet, even though yer are 'avin' it early. What's the subject?

JEAN (*amused*): A good old favourite. Science versus Religion.

MRS. COTTON: Never fancied either of 'em really. 'Ad a sister that went religious, chapel, and an uncle that was a bit on the scientific side—insects, chiefly——

REX *appears at door. He is in his shirt-sleeves, carrying a suitcase in one hand, and a woman's coat and various oddments in the other. He has a cigarette, unlit, in his mouth, and looks rather ruffled.*

REX: Put a light to this cigarette, somebody, please.

FAWCETT *goes up to him, with lighter. He speaks now to JEAN and MARION.*

MARION: Well, we're not really debating chapels versus insects.

REX: Thanks, old boy. Helping mother pack is no joke. (*Looking at them all.*) You look a queer gang in here. Mrs. Cotton, do you know anything about a little travelling clock?

MRS. COTTON: No, I don't.

REX: Neither do I.

JEAN: I believe it's in my room. Shall I go——

REX: No, I'm going up——

Goes out. During all this scraps of 'cello playing, often repeating same passage, have been heard, with breaks. It continues now, though not heard above dialogue clearly.

EDITH (*rather shyly*): But—in a way—it *is* chapels versus insects. I mean, *they* (*indicating JEAN and FAWCETT*) talk as if we were only a superior sort of insect——

FAWCETT (*impatiently*): Oh—don't start all that old stuff. Nobody's ever said anything of the sort.

MARION: No, you don't *say* it. But that's what you mean.

JEAN: No, we don't. The point is, if we study insect life, we know *exactly* what we're doing——

EDITH (*sharply*): And we know what we're doing in chapels and churches——

MARION: We're behaving like spiritual beings——

FAWCETT: Or like superstitious savages——

EDITH (*angrily*): Do savages have chapels and churches?

MARION: It's just savages who don't. And now they're turning themselves into savages again——

JEAN: On the contrary, we're using our reason and knowledge of scientific method——

MARION (*loudly*): To blow everything and everybody to bits——

MRS. COTTON: 'Ere, 'ere.

JEAN (*to MARION, angrily*): Chiefly encouraged by *your* precious Church——

MARION (*angrily*): That's simply not true—

FAWCETT (*rudely*): Yes of course it is—

MARION (*angrily*): No it isn't—and I'm not talking to you—

FAWCETT (*loudly*): You can't reason with 'em. They won't listen to it.

MRS. COTTON (*top of her voice*): Go on, our side. Chapels versus Insects (*she laughs*).

EDITH (*to FAWCETT*): If you'd just be quiet a minute and not interrupt——

FAWCETT (*overlapping with her*): Why should I be quiet? I've as much right to talk as you.

MARION (*angrily, overlapping too*): Because you don't understand what we're talking about. You're not arguing, you're just shouting——

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JEAN (*very loud, overlapping*): Well, I know what I'm talking about. I've had all this out years ago——

EDITH (*cutting in*): That doesn't make any difference. It doesn't prove you're right, does it?

JEAN (*together with MARION, as below*): I say, we used to talk this stuff for hours when I was in college, years ago——

MARION (*together with JEAN, as above*): No, but Jean always did know it all, and now she's a doctor, of course, naturally——

PROFESSOR LINDEN *has entered, and his voice cuts them off.*

PROFESSOR (*loudly*): Just a minute!

They are quiet, attentive to him. He speaks quietly now.

Listen to Dinah——

The door is open behind him, and now we hear quite clearly, though at some distance, the 'cello playing the rich melancholy second subject of the First Movement of the Elgar Concerto. They are all very still. The music dies away. Short pause.

MARION (*quietly*): What is that?

PROFESSOR: First Movement of the Elgar Concerto. I didn't know Dinah was doing the Elgar. She must have just started.

MRS. COTTON (*softly*): It sounds a sad piece.

PROFESSOR (*quietly*): Yes, it is. A kind of long farewell. An elderly man remembers his world before the war of 1914, some of it years and years before perhaps—being a boy at Worcester—or Germany in the 'Nineties—long days on the Malvern Hills—smiling Edwardian afternoons—Maclaren and Ranji batting at Lords, then Richter or Nikisch at the Queen's Hall—all gone, gone, lost for ever—and so he distils his tenderness and regret, drop by drop, and seals the sweet melancholy in a Concerto for 'cello. And he goes, too, where all the old green sunny days and the twinkling nights went—gone, gone. But then what happens? Why, a little miracle. You heard it.

JEAN (*softly*): Dinah playing?

PROFESSOR: Why yes. Young Dinah Linden, all youth, all eagerness, saying hello and not farewell to anything, who knows and cares nothing about Bavaria in the 'Nineties or the secure and golden Edwardian afternoons, here in Burmanley, this very afternoon, the moment we stop shouting at each other, unseals for us the precious distillation, uncovers the tenderness and regret, which are ours now as well as his, and our lives and Elgar's, Burmanley to-day and the Malvern Hills in a lost sunlight, are all magically intertwined. . . .

MRS. COTTON (*to the others, proudly*): When he likes, the Professor's a lovely talker.

PROFESSOR: That settles me. But that theme, you know—(*hums it a moment*) you can tell at once it's a farewell to long-lost summer afternoons. It's got a deep drowsy summerishness that belongs to everybody's youth—it's telling you quite plainly that now there aren't any such afternoons—the sun's never as hot, the grass as thick, the shade as deep and drowsy—and where are the bumble bees? God help me—I haven't seen a hammock for years and years and years. I must tell Dinah. (*Half turns, then checks himself.*) No, no, that'll keep. (*To the students.*) What are you two doing here? What about that meeting?

FAWCETT: We came to tell you. It's been cancelled.

EDITH: So as we had no other subject for this week's essay, we thought we'd better tell you at once.

PROFESSOR (*thoughtfully*): I see.

MARION (*to MRS. COTTON*): What about tea? I'll help.

MRS. COTTON: Come on then.

They go out together. PROFESSOR looks at students.

PROFESSOR: You're probably both going to the Union show to-night aren't you?

They nod and murmur "Yes".

Would it be a nuisance for you to slip in here afterwards? It wouldn't? Then do that, please. So off you go. And I'm sorry you had to wait.

PROFESSOR *goes to door, FAWCETT following. But EDITH looks at JEAN.*

EDITH (*humbly*): Dr. Linden—I hope I didn't sound rude when we were all arguing. Bernard always makes me lose my temper when he attacks religion.

JEAN (*smiling*): No, I didn't mind.

PROFESSOR (*as EDITH moves up*): High time you lost your temper, Miss Westmore. Pity I missed that. (*Confidentially.*) I lost my temper this morning, up at the University offices. Well, perhaps I shall see you to-night—

He is now ushering the students through the door. JEAN lights a cigarette. PROFESSOR returns, closing door.

JEAN: Did you lose your temper, this morning?

PROFESSOR (*with satisfaction*): I did. I raised merry hell. I told them they couldn't get rid of me simply by remembering we're supposed to have an age-limit.

JEAN: So you think it's all over and done with.

PROFESSOR (*eyeing her*): Don't you?

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JEAN (*softly*): No I don't.

Goes nearer to him.

PROFESSOR: I ought to write a letter or two.

JEAN (*now closer, softly*): They can wait a minute, Dad. And we're alone. Nobody listening. You can tell me. I'm not one of the *Get-Him-Out-Of-Here* party.

PROFESSOR: Who is—or are—members of it?

JEAN (*still softly*): Mother. Rex. Marion. Now confess, Dad, it's not all as easy as you pretended, is it?

PROFESSOR (*with elaborate whisper*): No—it isn't. Between ourselves, of course (*then in quite ordinary tone*). Nevertheless, I'll settle it all right. Actually the battle's not over—may be going on now. And I must write those notes—that wasn't an excuse not to talk. (*Going to desk or work table, to write.*) Lidley probably imagines from my grumpy manner that I haven't any friends round here. He's wrong. I still have a few. And his own position isn't as strong as he thinks, unless he has a string or two to pull that I don't know about. He may have, of course. (*Sitting down now, to begin writing.*) These notes are part of the campaign, otherwise I wouldn't bother about 'em now.

He begins writing swiftly. JEAN watches him for a moment or two, very thoughtfully. She opens her mouth as if to speak, then checks herself.

Yes?

JEAN: Nothing.

PROFESSOR (*still writing*): I thought you wanted to say something. If so, please say it. As Rex keeps telling us, there isn't much time.

JEAN (*after slight hesitation*): I may be conceited—people keep saying so—but—well, I know you're a very wise old bird, Dad, and you always understood me best. . . .

PROFESSOR (*looking up, putting pipe in*): So?

JEAN: What's the matter with me?

PROFESSOR (*lighting his pipe*): Not very much. Otherwise, you couldn't be doing the job you are doing.

JEAN: But there *is* something. I know that.

PROFESSOR (*coolly*): Feeling miserable, aren't you?

JEAN: Yes. And hating myself.

PROFESSOR (*calmly*): That's the trouble. You're resenting your own emotions. You're annoyed with yourself for being a woman. Quite wrong. After all, there's no escape from that. This man you're in love with.—Perhaps he isn't worth it. And you'll have to get over

him. I don't know—and don't much want to. But just remember, you're a young woman, with a hundred thousand other women among your ancestors—and all the medical degrees in the world don't change that fact—and don't try to pretend to yourself you're a termite queen or a creature from Mars or something. Because you have to attend to bewildered sick women who perhaps enjoy their emotions—luxuriate in 'em—you refuse to give your own an inch of rope. And then they tear back at you like having a wounded cat inside you.

JEAN: Just about. But what can I do?

PROFESSOR: Buy a bottle of gin. Sit up with a girl friend. Split the bottle, tell everything, have a dam' good cry—and enjoy every minute of it. Then start again, on a better basis.

JEAN: For myself, you mean?

PROFESSOR: For yourself, and for the rest of us. Don't demand a world as efficient, sterilised and scientific as an operating theatre. We couldn't live in it if we got it. Don't confuse science with life. It's an abstraction—neat and quick, to get certain things done. That's all. Even if the bath water's distilled and heated to just the right temperature, it's still the baby that's important. Messy things too, babies. Always will be. You won't mind too much when it's yours.

JEAN: Let's have a long talk next time, Dad.

PROFESSOR (*beginning to write again, quickly*): Yes, come up here alone, as soon as you can.

JEAN: But, Dad—I think I ought to warn you.

PROFESSOR (*still writing*): Yes?

JEAN: Mother's more serious than you think.

PROFESSOR (*glancing up*): She needs a change badly, of course. Burmanley's been a bit too much for her lately, I know. Don't blame her.

JEAN: It's gone further than you think.

PROFESSOR (*looking at her now, quietly*): You believe that, do you?

Enter MARION, holding door open.

MARION: Tea's in.

JEAN (*moving*): I'm coming.

PROFESSOR (*writing*): Early, isn't it?

MARION: Yes, but we shall be starting soon. But mother said you needn't bother. She's having hers now, and she said she wanted to talk to you.

JEAN has now gone.

PROFESSOR: There—or here?

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MARION: Here, I imagine. (*Hesitates a moment, drifting in a little.*) I hated that silly noisy argument we had this afternoon.

PROFESSOR (*still writing*): You made a hell of a row about it.

MARION: What's the matter with everybody here?

PROFESSOR: All kinds of things.

MARION: No, I mean—why are you all so completely materialistic now?

He looks up at her questioningly. She continues, with more warmth.
As if nothing on earth mattered but production—and exports—and what people earned——

PROFESSOR (*mildly*): We have to live, you know. And being poorer than we used to be, it's more of a problem.

MARION: But that's not all there is in life.

PROFESSOR: Not a bit. Only the start of it. The mechanics so to speak.

MARION: But it's all you seem to care about now. No, not you—yourself.

PROFESSOR: I know. Not me, but everybody else. Remember the miracle of the loaves and fishes——?

MARION: Yes, of course.

PROFESSOR: Materialistic?

MARION: No, that's quite different.

PROFESSOR: The idea's the same. Spread it out and give everybody a fair share. It's never been done before, you know, not in a whole large society. Oh—there's been colour, grace, culture, philosophy, nobly spiritual lives—but always with a lot of poor devils, whole masses of people, left clean out, slogging away in the dark, ignored, forgotten. Is it materialistic and sordid not to ignore and forget them, to bring them all out into the light, to take their share?

MARION: Yes, but to talk and think about nothing else——

PROFESSOR (*jumping up*): Wrong, yes. I keep saying so. But give us a chance, my dear Marion. Call us drab and dismal, if you like, and tell us we don't know how to cook our food or wear our clothes—but for Heaven's sake, recognise that we're trying to do something that is as extraordinary and wonderful as it's difficult—to have a revolution for once without the Terror, without looting mobs and secret police, sudden arrests, mass suicides and executions, without setting in motion that vast pendulum of violence which can decimate three generations before it comes to a standstill. We're fighting in

the last ditch of our civilisation. If we win through, everybody wins through. Why—bless my soul!—Marion——

He is leading her to the window now, then pointing:

Look—you see that flat-footed dough-faced fellow . . . slouching along there——

MARION (*half-laughing*): Yes. And I suppose he's the ordinary British citizen—the hero of the world——

PROFESSOR (*with sudden change of manner*): That's what I'd hoped, but actually I see it's poor Atherfield, our professor of physics, who took some bull-headed wrong line of his own upon the isotypes of uranium, or whatever it was—and so missed his place on the atomic band-wagon. If we're all blown to smithereens, he won't have contributed anything to the explosion—and the poor chap's heartbroken. But I must post my letters.

He hurries back to his desk or table and is putting letters in envelopes.

Enter MRS. LINDEN, she is dressed ready for travelling, but not wearing a hat or heavy coat.

MRS. LINDEN: Oh, there you are Marion. Do go and finish your tea. Rex wants to start in half an hour.

MARION: All right, Mother, don't fuss, I'm quite ready.

Exit MARION. MRS. LINDEN looks at the PROFESSOR steadily.

He looks at her, then slowly rises, the letters in his hand.

MRS. LINDEN: Did you hear anything more this afternoon, Robert?

PROFESSOR: No, my love. I have an idea that Lidley's busy with my protest at this very moment. Alfred Lockhart told me there might be some sort of meeting this evening. So I might have news later to-night.

MRS. LINDEN (*gravely*): You know what I think about it.

PROFESSOR: Yes. That even if they wanted me to, I'd be a fool to stay on. And as some of 'em don't want me, as I have to fight to keep my job, I'm out of my senses to stay. Right?

MRS. LINDEN (*sits down*): Yes. And Rex—and Marion—and even Jean, I think—agree with me.

PROFESSOR (*easily*): Well, they could be wrong too. (*Pause, looks at her.*) I don't enjoy not having you on my side in this, you know, Isabel.

MRS. LINDEN (*sharply*): And do you think I enjoy it? I hate it. I hate it. But they never really liked you here—that's what you've never understood. It never was your place. I knew it—and you

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ought to have known it. All this is just another reason why I'm glad to go.

PROFESSOR (*lightly*): You've had a particularly difficult time lately, I know, my dear. A change will do you good. Rex, who understands these things much better than I do, will see that you enjoy yourself. I'm glad you're going. When you come back, my little quarrel with Lidley and his set will be over, I hope—and we'll try to find some more help for the house.

MRS. LINDEN: I'm not coming back.

PROFESSOR (*stares at her*): You don't mean that.

MRS. LINDEN: Robert, I mean every word of it. I'm not coming back. I'm leaving Burmanley for ever.

PROFESSOR: Never mind Burmanley. You're leaving *me*.

MRS. LINDEN: I'm not leaving you. That's the point.

PROFESSOR: I don't see it.

MRS. LINDEN (*with more urgency now*): It's quite simple, Robert. You ought to retire—and you've been told to. There's nothing to keep us here. We can live with Rex for a time—he's very anxious that we should, and he can well afford to have us as his guests. Afterwards, if necessary, we can find a little place of our own. Everybody agrees that this is what we ought to do. It's perfectly obvious. But suddenly you've decided to be obstinate. *You* want to stay on here. But what about me? Have you ever thought about me?

PROFESSOR: I tried to, Isabel. And I realise it's not easy for you——

MRS. LINDEN (*urgently*): I never liked Burmanley from the first, but of course I put up with it—for your sake, always hoping that we'd soon be able to go somewhere else. During these last few years, with the older children away, with most of our friends dead or gone, with no proper help in the house, with all the rationing and queueing and drab misery, I've loathed every single day. And always I've been longing and praying for this time to come—when you'd have to retire—when we'd done with Burmanley for ever. Rex knew what I felt—he's always understood——

PROFESSOR (*lightly, but with underlying gravity*): Rex the Tempter—it's a part that suits him—offering you breakfast in bed at Huntingdon House—then Bond Street—a nice little lunch somewhere—a theatre—a little bridge——

MRS. LINDEN (*warmly*): All right. And why not? Rex and I understand each other, always have done. And if he offers me those things—yes, and having my hair done properly—and looking at silly

illustrated weeklies—and having a good woman's gossip—and sometimes spending money foolishly—and being nicely looked after——

PROFESSOR (*not sneering*): Is that what you've always really wanted?

MRS. LINDEN: No, it isn't, except somewhere at the back of my mind, like most women. What I've wanted is what I've had—looking after you and the children—keeping this house going—trying to plan good holidays for us all. And when it had to be done, I did it—and did it gladly. But it hasn't to be done any more. And now I don't want to spend another day in this hateful place——

PROFESSOR (*in wondering melancholy tone*): Hateful? Hateful? It's just a city—full of people working, trying to get along—not very different from us. Hateful?

MRS. LINDEN (*almost tearful now*): I don't mean I've never been happy here. It was different at first. But it's hateful now—grey, dismal—with a stupid shabby sort of life—all meaningless to me—so that sometimes I've felt like a wretched ghost. You've had your work—your students——

PROFESSOR: Yes, yes—I know it's easier for me—quite different. But——

MRS. LINDEN (*tearful, though not crying*): And soon I shall be sixty—all my life gone—Rex in London—Marion far away in France. And I tell you I hate this drab gloomy world we've made. Rex is right—the only thing to do is to laugh at it and then forget it. And now he's been here again—and talked so much—Marion too—if they went and left me here, I feel I'd die of misery——

As she almost breaks down, he crosses to comfort her.

PROFESSOR (*comfortably, as he crosses*): My dear, I'm sorry you feel like this—I know it's been hard——

When he is about to touch her, she waves him away.

MRS. LINDEN (*checking her emotion*): No, Robert, please! Let me say what I want to say. I'll be quite calm.

She makes an effort. He steps back. Then she speaks fairly quietly and firmly.

No, I'm not leaving you. I'm leaving Burmanley. And I'm doing it for your sake as well as for my own. I've tried to persuade you—so have the children—and now I'm doing the only thing that I think may make you behave sensibly. But I mean what I say. I'm going and I'm not coming back. If you stay here, Robert, you'll stay here alone—and I don't think you'll want to do that very long—thank goodness!

As he stands stiffly, she pleads a little.

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Robert, please! This isn't a quarrel. I'm not leaving you.

PROFESSOR (*gravely*): I think you are. A man stays where his work is, and the woman stays with the man.

MRS. LINDEN: And I did it for thirty-seven years. But you're no longer a man who has his work.

PROFESSOR (*bitterly*): That's the most damnably hurting thing you've ever said to me.

MRS. LINDEN: I'm sorry, Robert. I didn't say it to hurt you. But it's true—and you're hurting yourself because you won't admit it.

Enter REX, wearing an overcoat but no hat. He looks sharply at his parents, but takes an easy tone.

REX: Sorry to barge in. But I'd like to get off in about ten minutes. I've put most of the stuff in the car. Want to be alone?

MRS. LINDEN (*rather wearily*): No, it doesn't matter now. Come in, darling.

PROFESSOR goes over to the window and looks out, standing stiffly. REX and MRS. LINDEN exchange a look, then she rises and they meet. He takes her arm and pats her hand with his other hand, affectionately. She smiles rather sadly at him.

DINAH (*off, just outside, surprised*): But I didn't know you were going so soon.

MARION (*calling, further off*): In a few minutes.

DINAH (*off, as before*): Gosh!—I don't really know what's happening about this family.

JEAN (*further off, calling*): Has anybody seen my little red bag?

DINAH (*calling*): I'll have a look for it.

We hear her moving off whistling, the door being wide open. MRS. LINDEN gently releases herself from REX, pulling herself together, but stands near him. MARION enters, ready to go, and looking very smart. She glances at her father's back, and then exchanges meaning glances with her mother and REX.

MARION (*softly*): Dad—I hoped mother would have persuaded you to come with us.

PROFESSOR (*after turning, quietly*): Well, she hasn't, Marion. She tells me she's leaving Burmanley for good.

MARION: I know. And I think she's right. There's nothing for her here.

PROFESSOR: Except me. And some work still to be done.

MARION: I don't see that, Father. You needn't stay.

REX (*cheerfully*): They don't even want you to——

PROFESSOR (*sharply*): Rex—I've heard enough of that to-day.

REX (*who sees he is hurt*): Sorry, Dad. I didn't mean—

PROFESSOR (*cutting in, curtly*): All right.

MRS. LINDEN: If your father felt he was behaving sensibly, he wouldn't be so touchy. But he knows he isn't. I do think he's behaving with ridiculous obstinacy.

PROFESSOR: Quite possibly what I do may not be very important, but I want to keep straight on doing it. I don't believe this is simply personal vanity—an elderly man not wanting to be put on the shelf. Although even now I don't fancy being one of the passengers, I'd rather be with the crew.

REX: Is that one for me?

MARION: *And me?*

MRS. LINDEN: Well, if it is, it's absurd. Why shouldn't Rex—

PROFESSOR (*cutting in*): This isn't an attack on Rex. Or on anybody else. You all seem to think I'm unreasonable and I'm trying to explain myself. After all we've heard during the past twenty-four hours, we know by this time that Burmanley's a gloomy, shabby hole that nobody but an old fool would want to do any work in. And why work anyhow if you needn't? That's been the line. And it doesn't appeal to me. I don't like the sound of it. There's death in it, somewhere. Down these fancy side turnings, although there seems more fun and colour and light that way, there are dead ends. I don't want to walk away from real life, give it up as a bad job. It's a pity just now that it's got a pinched look, frayed cuffs and down-at-heel shoes—whereas some coffins have satin linings—but I prefer to stay with it and help a bit if I can—

MARION: I don't see what this has got to do with anything we've said.

MRS. LINDEN: And neither do I. And I don't believe it has. Has it, Rex?

She looks appealingly at REX, who does not reply but appears rather embarrassed.

PROFESSOR (*grimly*): Well—Rex?

REX finally shrugs his shoulders.

My dear, your son is much too intelligent to reassure you.

MRS. LINDEN (*sharply*): Too good-mannered, you mean.

PROFESSOR (*sharply*): His manners are excellent. I wish mine were half as good. But—if you will have it—what I *do* mean is that the whole lot of you, except young Dinah, are now busy turning away

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from life, giving it up. The Lindens are leaving the mucky old high road. And somebody's got to stay.

Enter DINAH and JEAN. The latter is ready for travelling.

DINAH: Mrs. Cotton's *furios* because she says somebody's taken her tin of soap flakes.

PROFESSOR (*taking his letters*): I must post these at the corner.

DINAH: I'll take them.

PROFESSOR (*beginning to move*): No, thanks. I'm letting off steam. Better finish it off outside.

He goes out hastily. There is at once a certain slackening of tension.

JEAN (*to REX*): Have I time to telephone to London?

REX: You have, but I wouldn't advise it. We'll make a stop on the road.

MRS. LINDEN: Dinah darling, how would you like to come to London? We could probably arrange for you to go to the Royal College or the Academy of Music.

DINAH (*excited*): And concerts! Wow! Of course that would be marvellous! But what's happening? Are we all going now? I haven't packed—or anything.

JEAN (*rather heavily*): No, we're not. Dad isn't going. (*To her mother.*) Is he?

MRS. LINDEN (*rather sharply*): No, he's not. And I was just going to explain that, Jean, if you hadn't interrupted.

JEAN (*pointedly*): I'm glad.

MRS. LINDEN: Don't interfere, please Jean.

JEAN: I'm not going to.

REX: Look, chaps—drop this. We'll be off in a minute——

MRS. LINDEN (*turning to DINAH*): Your father's staying here—at least for the time being, though in my opinion he won't be here very long, even if the University doesn't insist upon his resignation. And I think they will, although he pretends they won't.

DINAH: Then I shall stay too. Daddy couldn't be here all by himself. Besides, I like it here, really. (*Looks at them all rather accusingly.*) What's been happening? Have you been saying things to him?

REX (*with grin*): No, he's been saying things to us.

DINAH: Oh—that's all right, then. (*Looks anxiously at her mother.*) Do you think I'll be able to manage Mrs. Cotton?

MRS. LINDEN: Well, I never could,

DINAH: No, I'm better at her than you.

MARION (*worried*): Mother—I know I agreed it was the best thing to do—but—well, Dinah and Mrs. Cotton—I can't help feeling worried, you know—now that——

JEAN (*cutting in*): I should think so, too.

MRS. LINDEN: If I thought for a moment it was going to last, of course I'd agree with you. But it won't. And it's the only way. I told him plainly what I felt—but in his present mood I was just wasting my time. It really is the only way.

DINAH: What is? What's this all about?

REX (*as his mother doesn't reply*): About Dad staying on here——

DINAH: Oh—we'll manage all right—you'll see——

Enter MRS. COTTON, in a grim searching mood. DINAH turns and sees her.

Mrs. Cotton—you and I can manage this house somehow, can't we—and look after the Professor?

MRS. COTTON: Yes, we can. Manage better. (*Looks grim and searchingly at MARION*). Wasn't it you that was drying some smalls on the cistern this morning?

MARION (*taken aback*): No, it wasn't.

JEAN: They were mine—why?

MRS. COTTON (*grimly*): Well, it's a round biscuit-box really—with a dent in the lid and a picture of Clacton front round it—and full of my soap flakes——

JEAN: Well, I haven't seen it.

MRS. COTTON (*grimly*): That's what you say. One of you's taken it——

DINAH (*cheerfully*): No, they haven't. It's still here somewhere—and I'll find it. You know I can always find things. And I promise.

MRS. COTTON (*grumpily, going off*): All right, so long as you say so.

She goes. REX looks at his watch.

REX: We ought to be going, you know. Is everything in the car?

JEAN: My case isn't. It's in the hall.

REX (*moving*): I'll put it in. Then we ought to get cracking. There isn't much time. There isn't much time.

Goes out. As he goes, JEAN goes nearer DINAH.

JEAN: Dinah, if a telephone call comes for me, say I'm on my way back.

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DINAH: All right.

JEAN: Say I ought to be up at the hospital about eight or half-past. Is it worth telling Mrs. Cotton? How is she about telephones?

DINAH: She answers it, but she hates it—and so she says anything she feels at the time. As if a nasty-looking stranger had popped into the house.

Enter PROFESSOR.

PROFESSOR: Rex says you ought to be off.

MARION (*moving*): We're coming now.

PROFESSOR: I'll be out in a minute.

MARION: Oh—dear!

DINAH (*moving with JEAN*): What's the matter?

MARION (*still moving*): I don't know. But I feel rather sad now.

They go out leaving PROFESSOR and MRS. LINDEN alone, not far from door, ready to move out.

MRS. LINDEN: Will you be in to-night, Robert?

PROFESSOR: Yes, unless there are dramatic developments over at the University.

MRS. LINDEN: You're too optimistic about this business.

PROFESSOR: Why do you say that?

MRS. LINDEN: I have a feeling they want to get rid of you—and that they will. So don't expect too much. I'll ring you up from Rex's flat.

PROFESSOR: Good!

MRS. LINDEN: But I meant every word I said, Robert. I'm not coming back. It's for your sake as much as mine. And this time you'll have to give in. (*As if about to break down.*) Oh—Robert—I hate this——

PROFESSOR: So do I, Isabel. It's all wrong.

He kisses her, lightly.

You think I'm making a mistake. I think you are. But don't let's make a quarrel out of it, not after all these years. You're my wife. I love you very dearly.

MRS. LINDEN (*as if about to change her mind*): Oh—Robert—I'll—— (*She hesitates.*)

PROFESSOR: Yes, my dear?

REX can now be heard calling, through open door, impatiently but gaily.

REX (*off*): Come on Mother. We're all set—the road's a-calling——

MRS. LINDEN (*calling*): I'm coming, darling. (*Changed again now, she looks sharply at PROFESSOR.*) I'll ring you to-night, Robert.

She turns and walks out, and, with something melancholy in the set of his back, he follows her. We then hear DINAH calling.

DINAH (*off*): Yes, she is. She's here now.

There is a pause of a moment or two, then the telephone bell rings sharply. Then it waits a moment, and rings sharply again. Again it waits, then continues ringing. MRS. COTTON, smoking a cigarette and looking annoyed comes in to answer it.

MRS. COTTON (*at telephone*): Yes?... Who? Doctor?... Professor Linden lives 'ere. . . . Oh—that one. No, she isn't . . . just gone. . . . I don't know an' I don't care. . . . I sound bad-tempered 'cos I *am* bad-tempered.

As she bangs down the receiver, glares and blows smoke at it, the CURTAIN is coming down for the end of Scene I. House lights stay down.

SCENE II

When CURTAIN rises, a minute later, for opening of Scene II, at night, several hours later, curtains are drawn across window and artificial lighting is on. This lighting should not be as general as it was in Act I, Scene II, but more intimate, perhaps making use of large standard lamp downstage L. Door is half-open. DINAH and MRS. COTTON are conferring. DINAH is holding several small shop-keeping books, while MRS. COTTON is perched on arm of chair, still smoking a cigarette and holding a cup of tea. We feel that this housekeeping conference, for that is what it is, has been on some time. DINAH is puzzling over one of the small books, which she holds open, frowning at it, and MRS. COTTON is watching her, and nothing is said for a few moments.

DINAH: Oh—dear—this rationing's difficult, isn't it?

MRS. COTTON: 'Alf the time it isn't difficult—it's just bloody impossible. Minute I think o' them shops, up the language comes. I come out with it at Frost's, greengrocer's Tuesday mornin', an' 'e says "You're no lady to talk like that". An' I says "I know I'm not—but you're no greengrocer neither, though you've got it up outside you are", I says.

DINAH (*consulting book*): What's this about suet?

MRS. COTTON: I don't know—but try to get it, that's all. An' your pa likes a bit o' suety stuff—every proper man does—

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DINAH: I do too. Steak pudding—and treacle roll——

MRS. COTTON: That's 'cos you're young. Lies on my stomach like lead. But never mind what it says there about it. Just try to get some, that's all.

DINAH: Well, I will—but the trouble is, I haven't much time——

MRS. COTTON: Don't be silly. I'll do it, same as I did for your Mum. Leave it to me——

DINAH: Well, I'd like to, Mrs. Cotton, because I don't really understand much about housekeeping, though I'll do my best——

MRS. COTTON: Well, your best an' my best an' all the shops' best—won't make much dam' diff'rence, 'cos if we 'aven't got it, then we can't 'ave it. 'Cept on the Black Market touch, of course.

DINAH: If somebody offered me chocolate on the Black Market I'd take it.

MRS. COTTON: So would I. Specially soft centres.

DINAH: Hard centres, I like. But then nobody ever does.

MRS. COTTON: That's 'cos you're not in the know.

DINAH: Are you in the know, Mrs. Cotton?

MRS. COTTON: Not up this way, I'm not. Might be at 'ome. But I'll bet I know one who is—an' that's your brother——that Rex. An' I'll bet he has your Mum all fixed up nice on Black Market tack—chickens an' cream an' eggs an' whisky——

DINAH: I don't think Mummie likes whisky——

MRS. COTTON: I wish I didn't, 'cos I never see any, except that 'alf-bottle Bert sent me for Christmas.

DINAH (*with solemn air*): Well now, Mrs. Cotton, what about to-morrow——?

MRS. COTTON: Sunday.

DINAH: Yes, I know. But I mean—meals an' things——

MRS. COTTON: Don't you worry, we've enough stuff left over to do us nicely.

DINAH: Well, then, Monday——?

MRS. COTTON: It's only Saturday now—you needn't bother your 'ead about Monday. Leave it to me. An' don't look so solemn about it—'cos it's no use—it's all 'it or miss, these days, an' mostly miss—an' if you start takin' it all serious, you'll soon be off your rocker. Matter of fact, 'alf the people nowadays *are* off their rockers, what with one thing an' another. Told you about my cousin, 'aven't I?

DINAH: You mean the one who's married to two different men?

MRS. COTTON: No, that's poor Florrie—*she's* not all there neither.

But this is another one, Agnes, married to a baker. Know 'ow it takes 'er? (*In a loud whisper.*) Saves tissue paper. Collects it an' saves it. Go miles, for some. Smooths it out—irons it sometimes—an' puts it away all nice.—Got at least a cupboard full.

DINAH: But why?

MRS. COTTON (*same whisper*): Nobody knows. *She* doesn't know Bit mental. That's 'ow it takes 'er. I tell yer, ducks, there's more an' more goin' queer—mental. Man called at the back door, Thursday—clean-looking oldish man with a beard—spoke quite refined—an' said 'e'd bin sent by the Prophet Enoch—

DINAH (*astonished, half laughing*): The Prophet Enoch?

MRS. COTTON: True as I'm 'ere.

A distant ring, at front door.

DINAH: Somebody at the door. Do you think this might be one of them?

MRS. COTTON (*moving*): Might be. I'll go.

She goes out. DINAH gives the book in her hand a last puzzled look, then puts the book down. MRS. COTTON now reappears at doorway.

(*Grumpily.*) Student.

She shows in EDITH WESTMORE, *then closes door as she goes.*

EDITH: Professor Linden told us to call here to-night after the Union show—

DINAH: He's out but he'll be back any minute. Do sit down. Where's what's-his-name?

EDITH: Bernard Fawcett?

DINAH: Yes.

EDITH: He'll be coming along. But I didn't wait for him. He isn't a friend of mine—I don't like him much.

She is now sitting down—DINAH just perches casually.

DINAH: I don't know him really. He always looks as if something or somebody has just upset him.

EDITH: Usually they have. (*She laughs, then hesitates.*) Is your brother still staying here?

DINAH: No, he drove back to London this afternoon. Did you meet him?

EDITH: Just for a minute or two, yesterday. He's very attractive, isn't he?

DINAH: I don't know really.—Yes, I suppose he is.

EDITH: It's surprising he isn't married, isn't it?

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DINAH: He's not the type. I think. He couldn't bother settling down with just one person.

EDITH: Still—a lot of men seem like that, don't they? And then they do marry after all.

DINAH: Yes. I suppose it could happen with Rex. Probably somebody terribly glamorous—like a film star, that he could show off in expensive places. Rex is very clever in a sharp sort of way. Do you know a game called *Black Sam*?

EDITH (*rather despondently*): No. We never played games at home.

DINAH: It's our Linden family game. We used to play it a lot. And last night we played it again. And it was just the same as it used to be. Rex won again. He always used to win. (*Begins laughing.*) And the whole last hour he was cheating, and we didn't know. He always did when we used to play it. And last night—Jean—that's my doctor sister, who's very serious and grown-up usually—was absolutely *furious* with him. People don't really change much, do they? Not inside themselves. And when they let themselves go again—when they're back with the family and are being silly—they're just the same as they always were.

EDITH: One of my brothers is quite different from what he was before the war. Now he won't look at you for a long time but then he suddenly stares—and laughs—in a meaningless sort of way. (*Hesitates a moment, then hesitantly.*) Do you think—this lipstick—suits me—?

DINAH (*rather astonished*): I don't know. I'm not good on lipstick. (*Goes closer to her, inspecting her.*) No. Much too dark.

EDITH (*miserably*): Oh dear! (*Then, bursting out.*) Sometimes I wish I weren't a girl. Don't you?

DINAH: I used to. But now I don't care—just don't bother about it.

MRS. COTTON *opens door. Same tone as before.*

MRS. COTTON: Another student.

BERNARD FAWCETT *enters, wearing a very shabby overcoat and a muffler, but with no hat. MRS. COTTON closes door.*

FAWCETT (*gloomily*): Hello!

DINAH: Hello! Father'll be back any minute. Won't you take off your overcoat?

FAWCETT (*gloomily*): No thanks.

DINAH: What's the matter?

FAWCETT (*irritably*): These dam' colds I get. I had a bad one yesterday—all the week, in fact. Then this afternoon I thought it had gone. Now it's come back again. Head aches and can't taste anything properly. But I'll smoke if it's all the same to you.

DINAH: Of course.

FAWCETT *pulls out a clumsy-looking cherrywood, of the type favoured by young students, and lights it rather awkwardly, then puffs out smoke gloomily.*

FAWCETT: That Union show was lousy.

EDITH (*mildly*): I rather liked it this time.

FAWCETT (*rudely*): You would!

EDITH (*sharply*): Don't be so rude.

FAWCETT (*astonished*): What?

EDITH (*still sharply*): I said *don't be so rude*.

FAWCETT: What's the matter with you?

EDITH: I don't know why you boys think you have to behave like—like louts—just because you've come to a university—because you're students. If you could only see what you looked like—in comparison—with—with—other kinds of men—you'd—you'd——

FAWCETT: Don't bother with it, Westmore. You sound to me as if you've fallen for somebody.

EDITH (*hastily*): I haven't—don't be stupid——

FAWCETT (*turning to DINAH*): What's this about your father?

DINAH (*alert at once*): What about him?

FAWCETT: Told another bloke who's taking history—chap called Thring—I was coming on here to get next week's essay subject—and he said I needn't bother. Because, he told me, there's a strong rumour going round that your father's retiring—right off——

DINAH (*sharply*): Well, it isn't true.

FAWCETT: Very strong rumour, he said. "Prof. Linden's had it" he said.

EDITH (*hastily*): Oh—for goodness sake, shut up.

FAWCETT: Why should I—(*he sneezes violently*). Oh—blast!

DINAH (*who has been rigid, fiercely*): And I hope it's 'flu—and the kind that gives you awful pains in your inside and they make you have castor oil——

She has now stalked out. FAWCETT stares after her in astonishment, then looks at EDITH.

FAWCETT: Did she say she hoped it was 'flu?

EDITH (*fiercely*): Yes. She was furious because you said that about her father. "Prof. Linden's had it"! What a way to talk! And what a thing to say to *her*!

FAWCETT (*patiently, misunderstood*): Look! Now what have I done? I meet a bloke called Thring——

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EDITH (*angrily*): And I hope he has gastric 'flu too.

FAWCETT (*wrestling hard with his cold*): Women! Girls! Women! The more—more—more I see—(*another sneeze coming and he wrestles with it*).

EDITH *begins laughing. He glares at her.*

How I admire your wonderful delicate sense of humour, Miss Westmore!

EDITH (*laughing*): If you only saw yourself. (*Laughs.*)

FAWCETT (*shouting*): I don't want to see myself——

Enter PROFESSOR LINDEN.

PROFESSOR: Well, Fawcett, if you don't want to see yourself, there's no reason why you should, until you shave, to-morrow morning. Good evening, Miss Westmore. And I apologise once again for keeping you waiting.

EDITH: It's all right, Professor Linden.

PROFESSOR (*sitting down*): Thank you. What with my family coming and going—and other things—I seem to have completely lost my well-deserved reputation for punctuality. Well—this afternoon's meeting of the Burmanley Citizens' Vigilant Society was postponed—eh? And so, much to your relief, I imagine I'll have to find another subject for next week's essay.

FAWCETT: Yes.

EDITH (*timidly*): Professor Linden——?

PROFESSOR: Yes?

EDITH (*timidly*): We shall be coming to you next week—I mean——

PROFESSOR (*rather sharply*): I hope so. Why not?

They exchange glances, and he notices it. He gets up and moves a pace or two, impatiently, then more to himself than to them.

Really—this is too bad. (*He turns to them.*) So you've heard rumours that I may not be here next week—eh?

FAWCETT: Yes. Only just to-night—at the Union.

PROFESSOR: I see. (*To EDITH.*) And you too?

EDITH (*unhappily*): Yes—I did hear—something.

PROFESSOR: You oughtn't to have done. But it only proves what I've said before—that a university is a mad village.

They stare at him for a moment, and there is a pause while he reflects. Then, with more decision:

You two are pretty average Burmanley History students and here's a question I'd like to put to you, to be answered quite truthfully. If

you're merely polite about it, then you'll make me sorry I asked it. (*Pauses, then quietly and impersonally.*) Would it really matter to you—if I wasn't here next week?

EDITH (*involuntarily*): Oh—dear!

PROFESSOR: A truthful impersonal answer mind. Fawcett?

FAWCETT (*steadily*): No, sir, it wouldn't—not really. I get on all right with Mr. Pearse and Mr. Saxon. I don't mean—

PROFESSOR (*quietly*): Never mind about what you don't mean. You gave me an honest answer. Now, Miss Westmore—

EDITH (*struggling*): Oh dear!—it's so difficult—

PROFESSOR: I could take that as an answer, if necessary.

EDITH (*struggling away*): No, I mean I enjoy your lectures more than anybody else's—and coming here for the essays—I don't understand you always as I do Mr. Pearse—but of course it would matter terribly if you went—

PROFESSOR (*quietly*): No, it wouldn't. You're giving me the same answer.

As she tries to apologise.

No, please, Miss Westmore. If you try to apologise to me, then I ought first to apologise to you—for asking such a question—and we might be at it all night. (*With an obvious effort.*) Well, that's that. But—because we don't know what's going to happen—that's no reason for not doing a bit of work, is it? So let's get back to the Sixteenth Century . . . the Sixteenth Century. . . . (*He moves about a little, trying to concentrate.*) Yes—well. Shakespeare's at the Globe Theatre, writing imperishable masterpieces. Suppose you try to trace the connection between that glorious fact and the rise of the Lombard cities and the development of the banking system.

FAWCETT (*dismayed*): The banking system?

PROFESSOR: Yes. You go back a century, of course. *Twelfth Night*, *Hamlet*—here—and there, the Italian cities and the banking system. Letters of credit and loans at five per cent, at one end of the chain, and at the other a crowded wooden theatre near the Thames and the afternoon fading and a player with a whitened face murmuring *Absent thee from felicity awhile*. That's all.

FAWCETT (*as they rise to go*): And if you're not here—

PROFESSOR (*rather sharply*): I've not been told yet that I shan't be, Fawcett. In fact, you may take it that I will be.

The telephone rings. PROFESSOR goes to answer it.

EDITH (*hissing at FAWCETT*): Idiot!

FAWCETT (*indignant whisper*): What for?

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EDITH (*same*): Oh—shut up!

PROFESSOR (*at telephone*): Yes? . . . This is Professor Linden speaking . . . all right. . . . (*He turns to the students looking old and bleak now.*) This is a call from London and it may take some time, so would you mind letting yourselves out? And we meet here, I hope, next Friday at the usual time.

EDITH (*moving out*): Yes. Good night, Professor Linden.

FAWCETT (*moving out*): Good night.

PROFESSOR: Good night. . . .

They go out, leaving door ajar. He now answers telephone.

Yes, Isabel—Robert here. . . . Good. . . . No, no news at all, but rumours are flying round, of course . . . well, if it should be vanity, it's already receiving a shock or two . . . no, not worth talking about. . . . Do I? Well, you never did like my telephone voice, did you, my dear? And I may be rather tired. . . . Mrs. Cotton? I'll give her a shout, then we can go on talking. Just a minute.

Leaves telephone hastily and goes to door, calling "Mrs. Cotton—Mrs. Cotton—hurry!—telephone", and then goes back to telephone.

I've called her. . . . No, don't worry about us. Regarded from the splendours of Rex's flat, we probably seem worse off than we really are. . . . Certainly, why shouldn't you enjoy it, my dear. I'm glad. . . . Well, I was never good at sounding glad on a long-distance telephone late on Saturday night. . . . Yes, Isabel, I know, but that's how I feel and while I still live at all, I have to live with myself.

MRS. COTTON *now appears.*

. . . Let's leave it at that then, my dear—here's Mrs. Cotton.

He hands her the receiver, which MRS. COTTON takes grimly, speaking into it in grim tone.

MRS. COTTON (*at telephone*): This is Mrs. Cotton. . . . Yes, Mrs. Linden—well, you said that this morning . . . oh, we'll manage. . . . I'll tell 'em first thing Monday.—What? . . . Oh—

She glances at PROFESSOR, who is standing not far away.

A bit pinched, I'd say—as if it was a colder night than it is, if yer see what I mean. . . . Yes.—Oh, *she's* all right. . . . I tell yer, we'll manage. . . . To-morrow night, same time? I'll tell 'im. 'Bye. (*Puts down receiver as if she disliked it.*) Sho's goin' to ring yer same time to-morrow night. Money no object. Mr. Rex, I suppose. (*Sniffs dubiously.*) All this talkin' on telyphones—where's it get yer?

PROFESSOR (*rather despondently*): I don't know. I'm not good at it.

MRS. COTTON: Not yuman, that's what's wrong with it. Oh—there's a message for you.

PROFESSOR: Yes?

MRS. COTTON: Young woman—pal o' Miss Dinah's—brought 'er some gramophone records—an' a message for you at the same time—works in 'is office, I think——

PROFESSOR: Whose office?

MRS. COTTON: That Mr. Lock'art. She said 'e's comin' to see yer to-night—might be any time now——

PROFESSOR (*slowly, softly*): I see. Well, Alfred Lockhart's an old friend of mine—and—(*looking her in the eye*) Mrs. Cotton—how much whisky is there left?

MRS. COTTON (*with innocent air*): Not much. Might be a couple o' pub doubles—and yer know what they are now——

PROFESSOR: There ought to be more than that.

MRS. COTTON: There isn't. Soon goes.

PROFESSOR (*softly*): It does. You couldn't—by any chance—have had any lately, could you?

MRS. COTTON (*after giving him a nod*): Just a nip—yesterday morning—when that ceiling come down—an' reminded me, you know—just 'ad to 'ave a nip.

PROFESSOR: Yes, fair enough. I'd have done the same.

MRS. COTTON: Ah—you an' me, Professor—we can get on all right—live an' let live—that's our motto.

PROFESSOR: Something like that. Well, bring what's left of the whisky and a couple of glasses for Mr. Lockhart and me. We've a ceiling coming down too.

Sound of gramophone, distant and behind closed door, comes through now.

MRS. COTTON: Right. 'Ear that? Music. She's at it. (*Smiles with some tenderness.*) Talked to me to-night in 'ere about 'ouse-keepin' an' shoppin' an' all that—wants to look after yer properly, she does—bless 'er!

PROFESSOR (*gently*): You must look after her, Mrs. Cotton. I know you're fond of her.

MRS. COTTON: As if she was my own. Kid got me from the first go off—one reason why I stayed. That Dinah, Professor—she's growin' up of course——

PROFESSOR: Yes, seventeen.

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MRS. COTTON (*solemnly*): Eighteen. But she still lives in the land o' childhood, where you an' me's forgotten.

PROFESSOR (*astounded*): My dear Mrs. Cotton, it's true of course but what an extraordinary thing for you to say——

MRS. COTTON (*complacently*): 'Eard a chap say it top of a tram—one Easter Monday—an' it stuck in my mind. Crossin' the river we was—packed of course—an' it was rainin' a bit an' sun shinin' all at the same time—way it does about Easter—an' everything suddenly so bright an' shiny I could 'ave laughed an' cried. So when I 'eard 'im say that it stuck in my mind. Yer know?

PROFESSOR (*softly*): Yes. And perhaps, after all, we're not forgotten.

As if the door is now wide open, the gramophone can now be heard, clearly but still distantly. It is the Casals recording of the final movement of the Elgar 'Cello Concerto—the passage, before the very end, in which earlier themes are recalled poignantly.

PROFESSOR begins listening intently.

MRS. COTTON (*quietly*): I'll get yer that whisky.

She goes, and as he listens near the open door, he is joined by DINAH, in a fine state of excitement.

DINAH (*in a loud whisper*): That's Casals. You didn't think it was me, did you?

PROFESSOR: I wondered, but I couldn't think how you'd got the B.B.C. symphony orchestra into the dining-room.

DINAH: Wouldn't it be marvellous if you could? Just pack them up in a magic little box?

PROFESSOR: They're in one now. Last movement, isn't it?

DINAH: Yes, and I'll never be able to play it properly for ages and ages—if ever. Listen—(*the music comes through poignantly*) he's remembering the earlier themes now, Daddy, and saying good-bye to them.

PROFESSOR (*quietly, almost to the music*): Wandering through the darkening house of life—touching all the things he loved—crying Farewell—for ever—for ever——

After a moment, there is heard a ring at the front door.

DINAH (*crossly*): Oh—bother! I'll go. (*Hurries out.*)

PROFESSOR (*going to doorway, calling*): If it's anybody but Alfred Lockhart, I can't see them. (*Going out to look.*) Oh—it is you, Alfred.

LOCKHART (*calling*): Yes.

PROFESSOR: Come up. Dinah, when you've finished with the gramophone, you'd better go to bed.

DINAH (*as she hurries past doorway*): All right, but I'm a bit excited.

PROFESSOR *now ushers in* LOCKHART, *who wears a dark overcoat and carries a dark hat. He looks grave.*

PROFESSOR (*still near door, not closed*): Alfred, you're wearing your undertaker's look to-night. Won't you take your coat off?

LOCKHART: No, thanks, Robert. I mustn't stay long.

MRS. COTTON *appears with a tray on which are two glasses, small jug of water, and whisky decanter with small amount of whisky in it.*

MRS. COTTON: 'Ere it is, what's left of it—so make the most of it, I say. (*Goes to put tray down.*)

PROFESSOR: Thank you, Mrs. Cotton. And there won't be anything else to-night. So—good-night.

MRS. COTTON (*moving out*): Good night. An' I'll try an' get that young madam off to bed too. (*She goes out and closes the door behind her.*)

PROFESSOR: A little whisky, Alfred?

LOCKHART (*gravely*): I'd rather get the official part of my visit over first, if you don't mind, Robert.

PROFESSOR: I thought there must be an official part.

They have now sat down.

LOCKHART: I'm not enjoying this. That's why I wanted to get it over to-night.

PROFESSOR: Go ahead.

LOCKHART (*steadily, impersonally*): I've been instructed by the Vice-Chancellor that in the circumstances he will not press for your immediate resignation—though he deplores—and he particularly asked me to tell you this—the attitude you have adopted and trusts you will reconsider your decision——

PROFESSOR (*cutting in*): Alfred, I can't listen to any more of this jargon or watch you pretending to be a Civil Service dummy. What have they agreed to? Do I stay as I am?

LOCKHART: No.

PROFESSOR (*shocked*): What?

LOCKHART: It's a compromise. I expected it, as I hinted this morning. You give up the Chair and most of the work but you can stay on an Emeritus level—no examining—off the Board of Studies—about half-salary—a little more perhaps——

PROFESSOR (*angrily*): God!—Alfred—it's an insult——

LOCKHART: It's what I expected.

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PROFESSOR: But was there a proper meeting?

LOCKHART: Yes.

PROFESSOR: But what about Drury and Hamilton—and my lot——?

LOCKHART: They were there. Didn't like it. Hamilton said what he thought—he was pretty fierce. But they had to give in.

PROFESSOR (*quietly*): We'll have that whisky now, I think. (*Gets up and begins pouring it.*) And don't keep on being official, Alfred. You and I have known each other for over twenty years—skirmished and fought together—and tied up each other's wounds—eh?

LOCKHART (*calm and mild*): Yes. And I'm not being official any longer. To hell with 'em. And I'm sick of this job. I'll find a way out—and soon too.

Takes the glass PROFESSOR gives him.

Thanks, Robert. Can you spare it?

PROFESSOR: No, and neither can my housekeeper.

LOCKHART (*calmly*): It'll taste all the better. (*Looks solemnly over his glass.*) *Skoal!*

PROFESSOR (*raising his glass*): *Salut!*

They drink solemnly.

LOCKHART: I'll say what I tried to tell you this morning. You shouldn't have given them this chance. You should have walked out. Your wife was right——

PROFESSOR: You behaved badly there, Alfred, lending yourself to female intrigue. Isabel, by the way, has gone to live with Rex, and says she's never coming back here.

LOCKHART: Bad in theory, but right and sensible in practice—trying to force your hand. You ought to join her on Monday. Tell the V.C. he can keep his Emeritus nonsense. I'd enjoy taking him a message in your best style, Robert.

PROFESSOR: I'd two students here to-night, Alfred. Average types—Fawcett and the Westmore girl—so, like a fool, I did a Gallup Poll on them—would it really matter to them if I did go? I gathered it wouldn't. So far as they are concerned, I might as well be in Rex's super-flat to-night, swigging his excellent Black Market whisky.

LOCKHART: That's where I'd be.

PROFESSOR (*softly*): No, you wouldn't, Alfred you old liar. What about the job that Masterton, the motor chap offered you, last year, with an expense sheet as long as your arm? You turned it down—to toil on here.

LOCKHART: I was a fool.

PROFESSOR: I'm the same kind of fool. And insult or no insult, students or no students, wife or no wife, I'm staying—

LOCKHART (*rather angrily, for him*): But why? What in God's name do you think you can do here now?

PROFESSOR: Be an old nuisance. Make senile mischief. Throw large spanners into their Godless works. I'll grab the pick of the history honours people and show them what life's done so far with this gaudy little planet. I'll give lectures that have about as much to do with the syllabus as Brock's fireworks. I'll contradict every dreary little lie about humanity that Pearse and Saxon and the rest can cook up. I'll—

LOCKHART (*cutting in, rather sharply*): Don't go on, Robert. Because I think you're bluffing.

PROFESSOR, *who has been on his feet during his last speech, turns away, hurt, but not wanting LOCKHART to see he is hurt. LOCKHART, however, guesses this and rises, moving nearer PROFESSOR. The latter turns and looks at him, reproachfully.*

LOCKHART: I'm sorry. Even if I thought that, I oughtn't to have said it.

PROFESSOR: If you can think it, then you'd better say it—even to-night. But perhaps I was bluffing a bit—whistling in the dark perhaps. Let's put it like this, then. I've been here a long time—I like the glum mucky old place. And times are hard, Alfred—we've got to keep on if we can. And there might be something I could help to do here, before the light goes. A touch of colour. A hint of wonder. An occasional new glance at old stuff. A bit of insight. Or is it the characteristic vanity of the Emeritus type?

LOCKHART: No, it isn't. You've all that to give. If they'll let you.

PROFESSOR (*a trifle bleakly, at first*): Yes, there's that. And it's not so much men—as machines—that we have to beat. The new educational machine here, for instance. And generally—the capital-industrial machine—and now the Trade Union machine and the Civil Service machine.

LOCKHART: Right.

PROFESSOR: I was telling my family, who don't care a damn, that we're trying to do a wonderful thing here. And so we are. But somehow not in a wonderful way. There's a kind of grey chilly hollowness inside, where there ought to be gaiety, colour, warmth, vision. Sometimes our great common enterprise seems only a noble skeleton, as if the machines had already sucked the blood and marrow out of it. My wife and family tell me to go away and enjoy myself. Doing what? Watching the fire die out of the heart, and never even

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stooping to blow? Here in Burmanley—with Dinah and her kind—and a few friends and allies—I can still blow a little—brighten an ember or two.

LOCKHART: The young and the old are the best now, Robert. There's a lot of rotten dead stuff in the middle——

PROFESSOR: But perhaps there always was, and the young and the old were always the best. Nearer the door in and the door out, and with more spirit to spare. The world's too much with the middles, who are busy looking for promotion and a seat on the Board.

LOCKHART: Robert—you look tired—cold too. Go to bed and don't bother seeing me out——

PROFESSOR (*exasperated*): Damn it, man, I'm sixty-five—not eighty-five——

LOCKHART (*moving rapidly, decisively*): Good night.

He is out before PROFESSOR can get near him. As PROFESSOR is at door, we hear a rather desolate door-slam off. PROFESSOR now comes down and may here make change to more intimate lighting still, with most of stage in shadow. PROFESSOR moves slowly and wearily, and now for first time looks really dispirited. He sits down in light, rather heavily, puts a pipe in his mouth but does not smoke it, but stares rather desolately, perhaps with his head in his hands. DINAH, now in pyjamas, slippers, thick dressing-gown, enters very quietly, closing door softly behind her, and looking concerned at sight of her father brooding there, slowly comes down.

DINAH (*softly*): Daddy!

PROFESSOR (*looking up*): Hello, Dinah. Thought you'd gone to bed.

DINAH: I started—but—(*lets this trail off. Then softly.*) You looked so miserable sitting there——

PROFESSOR (*neither denying nor agreeing*): I was brooding a bit. There are times—— (*He breaks off.*)

DINAH (*encouragingly*): Yes?

PROFESSOR (*with a sheepish grin*): Well—let's say—there are times. Leave it at that.

She glances with concern at him, then settles in large arm-chair, not far from where he is sitting, preferably up at desk or table.

Here, young woman—settling down?

DINAH: Will you do something specially to please me?

PROFESSOR: I might.

DINAH: Do you remember—you read us once—a bit of that book on history you started writing? Will you read some of it again—the beginning——

PROFESSOR: You don't want that stuff.

DINAH: I do. I *need* it. *You* need it. And if we don't have it, I'll go to bed and be miserable—and you'll go on being broody and lonely down here. So—please!

PROFESSOR (*in pretence of grumbling tone*): All right then—if I can find the thing—

She settles back, as he brings the MS. out of drawer, puts on a pair of spectacles, and then begins to read—quietly but impressively.

“History, to be worthy of the name, should bring us a stereoscopic view of man's life. Without that extra dimension, strangely poignant as well as vivid, it is flat, and because it is flat it is false. There are two patterns, endlessly being superimposed on one another. The first pattern is that of man reproducing himself, finding food and shelter, filling the land, building cities, crossing the seas. It is the picture we understand now with ease, perhaps too easily. For the other pattern is still there, waiting to be interpreted. It is the record of man as a spiritual creature, with a whole world of unknown continents and strange seas, gardens of Paradise and cities lit with hell-fire, within the depths of his own soul. History that ignores the god and the altar is as false as history that could forget the sword and the wheel. Nor does the former belong only to the first youth of a civilisation——” (*Breaks off to say quietly, glancing up.*) I don't like “former”—can't imagine—(*his voice gets softer and slower*) how I came to write it. . . .

For now standing up, quietly, he sees that DINAH is fast asleep. He looks down smilingly for a moment. As he quietly sits down again, takes out a pen and crosses out a word or two in the MS. the CURTAIN is slowly descending.

END OF PLAY